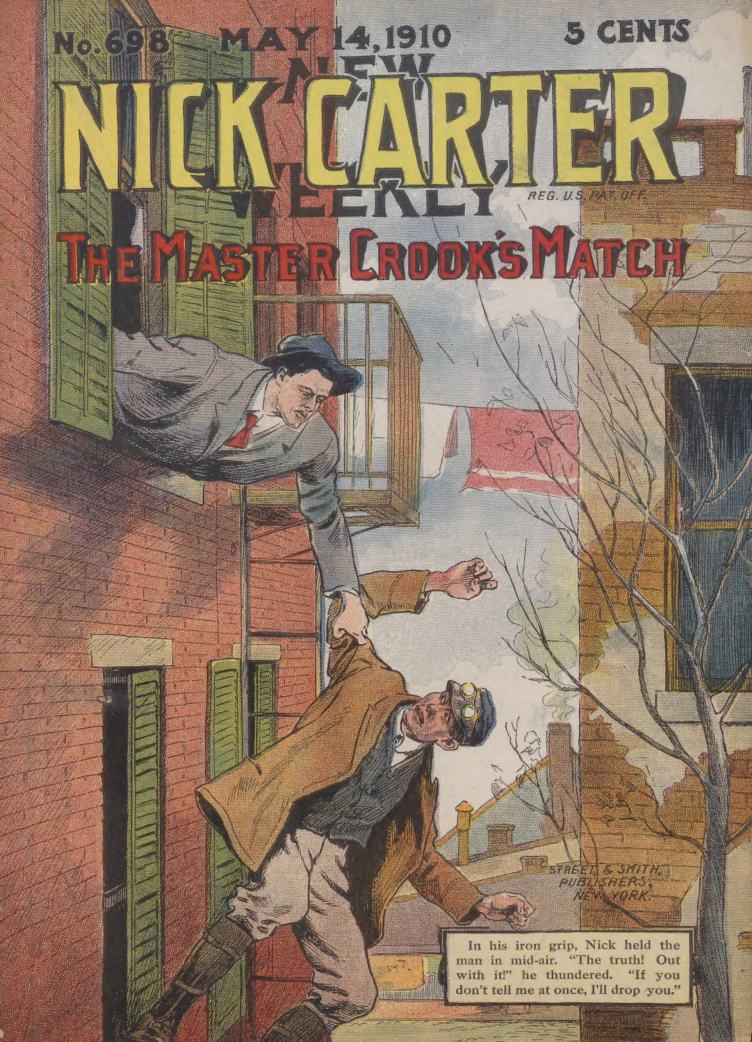
No. 698 MAY 14, 1910 5 CENTS

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

THE MASTER CROOK'S MATCH



STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK.

In his iron grip, Nick held the man in mid-air. "The truth! Out with it!" he thundered. "If you don't tell me at once, I'll drop you."

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*
Copyright, 1910, by STREET & SMITH.
No. 698. NEW YORK, May 14, 1910. Price Five Cents.

The Master Crook's Match;

OR,

NICK CARTER ON HIS METTLE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

MR. GASTON DUPONT.

"Oh, really, Detective Carter, your claims are quite absurd," said Dupont, laughing a bit boisterously. "You will pardon me for speaking so plainly, I'm sure; but when one expresses an opinion, I think it should be perfectly frank, and straight from the shoulder."

"So do I, Mr. Dupont," said Nick, narrowly eying the man. "Do not put a bridle on your tongue because we meet this evening for the first time. I confess that you interest me."

"Ah, I'm delighted, I'm sure," cried Dupont, with a wave of both slender white hands. "Delighted, despite our opposite views. A difference of opinion, however, should not prevent our becoming good friends."

"Surely not. I admire a man with a mind of his own, and who dares express it."

"My sentiments to a T, Mr. Carter. The world gets on the faster because of our differences. Every forward step is the result of friction."

"I agree with you in that," said Nick.

"So glad!" Dupont tersely exclaimed, bowing and laughing. "So glad, too, that I interest you, my dear Carter. I'm a bit peculiar, you know, not quite American, for I was born abroad and educated in the universities of Europe. But I am fond of Americans, very fond, and admire their energy, enterprise, and splendid institutions. I'm delighted, I'm sure, that I interest you."

Nick Carter found him of more interest, in fact, than appeared on the surface.

The lights burned brightly in the parlor—that of a magnificently furnished suite on the fourth floor of an exceedingly fashionable New York hotel. It was occupied by Mr. Arthur Whitney and his handsome wife; the man, a millionaire banker of forty, of an old, aristocratic family, but very genial and popular; the woman an accomplished beauty, a devotee of fashion, and a recognized leader among the smart set.

Nick Carter had enjoyed friendly relations with them for years.

In a sleeping room across the hall of the commodious suite, Mrs. Whitney was engaged with her maid,

Mary Bowen, who had come up from her supper a short time before.

Following her soon after came a fashionable hairdresser, who also had repaired to "my lady's chamber." He was a tall, bearded man, of about fifty, in ministerial black, whose business card was somewhat pompously inscribed: "Devereau. Tonsorial Artist."

It was nine o'clock one evening in March.

A bluish film of cigar smoke hovered over the table near which the three men were seated—Nick Carter, Arthur Whitney, and Gaston Dupont.

The latter, also, was a guest of the hotel. He had been living there six months. If he had any vocation, it was not generally known, nor whence he came.

Nevertheless, Dupont was sometimes seen in Wall Street. He dabbled in stocks and occasionally had callers of business-like appearance; but he never remarked upon his means of livelihood, other than to vaguely refer at times to an interest in South American mines, always with an air of supercilious indifference—much as if a mine or two, more or less, was of as little consequence as a button on his coat.

Dupont had made friends with every one in the house. His manners were irreproachable. His dress was always correct. He was a fascinating talker, speaking several languages fluently, and was up in the arts and sciences. The door of fashionable society and the best clubs had been opened to admit him.

He kept a valet—one Peter Cliquot. Dupont had brought him from Paris—or said so. He owned an automobile and employed a chauffeur—one Patrick Kennedy. Nobody knew where Kennedy had come from.

Gaston Dupont appeared to have anything and everything he wanted. He seemed to enjoy life—and an unlimited income.

Nick Carter had heard of him, but never had met him until this evening—a tall, smoothly shaved man of about forty, with a classic, clean-cut face, a pair of steel-blue eyes that were capable of an infinite variety of expressions. His teeth were white and even. His smile was agreeable, when genuine, his brow broad and hair dark, though slightly sprinkled with gray.

Sauntering into the hotel that evening, Nick had met him, in company with Arthur Whitney, and accepted the banker's invitation to go up to his apartments with them and smoke a cigar. Nick had consented partly because he wanted to talk with Dupont, this being his first opportunity, and to study him furtively at short range.

Dupont evidently found the meeting equally agreeable. He was gracious, vivacious, and begged a thousand pardons for referring to Nick's vocation, protesting that he became so personal only because of his desire to discuss it with so distinguished a detective.

He disagreed with him, however, somewhat to Whitney's amusement, and at times emphasized his remarks by pounding the table noisily with his fingers, to an extent that Nick judged that he had drunk freely of wine while at dinner.

"The traditional detective," Dupont proceeded to argue, "the hero of fiction, with his lightning-like changes of disguise, his marvelous instinct and discernment, his extraordinary genius for analysis and deduction, his peculiar methods and sensational exploits—really, my dear Carter, he is as unlike the detective in every-day life as the clown in a circus is unlike the serious, blear-eyed fellow who emerges from the dressing tent after the show, and hurries to the nearest barroom to cheer himself with a schooner of beer. Isn't that right, Whitney?"

"Don't ring me into your discussion," laughed the banker. "Fight it out with Nick."

"It is not strange that a layman has that opinion," Nick said pleasantly. "It is, however, quite erroneous."

"Indeed!"

"Entirely so, I might say."

Dupont elevated his brows and appeared surprised.

"If detectives were not more capable than you seem to think," Nick added, "they would accomplish very little against the modern crook, who, when it comes to cunning, craft, and ingenuity, keeps pace with the best men the law can obtain to oppose him."

"That's right, too," nodded Whitney.

"Ah, but it is not right," cried Dupont, laughing. "That is just the point I designed to make."

"Why not right?" Nick inquired.

"Because crooks are not men of ability and foresight. They come from a class that does not produce that type of man. I venture to assert, Detective Carter, that you were never opposed by a knave who, if he had been honest, would have displayed more than average business ability."

"You are wrong again, Dupont. Some of the brightest men I ever knew were crooks."

"Are they in prison?"

"Yes."

"Caught and convicted by you?"

"With the help of others."

"That alone proves they are not as bright as you thought them."

"You imply that I flatter myself."

"Oh, no!" Dupont beat the table again, laughing loudly. "I know, Detective Carter, that you are a very clever, very formidable, man. I meant only this, that no capable crook ever left himself so unguarded that a detective could run him down."

"H'm, I see."

"If he failed in knavery, he tackled more than he could handle. Very probably he would have failed in business. He was either careless, or incapable. He was inferior. He was not a master crook."

"A master crook, eh?"

"Very few, if any, regard knavery as a purely business proposition. Most of them commit crimes when the opportunity presents itself, or can be easily brought about, and they take absurd risks of detection."

"There is some truth in that," Nick admitted.

"And that is why our prisons are full," Dupont forcibly declared. "It is not because detectives, if you will pardon me, are particularly clever."

"Why don't you turn crook, Dupont, and match your ability against the genius of Nick Carter?" suggested Whitney, through a wreath of smoke. "It might prove to be a battle royal."

Dupont thumped the table again and laughed shrilly, as if he thoroughly enjoyed the joke.

"I might, at that," he cried; "give Detective Carter a run for his money."

CHAPTER II.

ONE MINUTE TOO LATE.

Nick Carter detected a subtle gleam in Dupont's cold blue eyes, and in his voice a sinister, metallic-like ring that would have escaped ears less finely trained than his own. He laid aside the end of his cigar, remarking lightly:

"A run for my money, eh? Very possibly, Dupont. How, by the way, would you proceed?"

"Precisely as I have intimated."

"On strict business principles, eh?"

"Certainly."

Dupont bowed and looked wise, gazing at the detective with a lurking gleam between his narrowed eyelids.

"I would prepare for knavery with far greater care and caution than for any ordinary business," he continued. "I would make myself familiar with every department of it. I would study every art and science that can be turned to advantage; mechanics, engraving, chirography, the making of inks and paper, the effects of drugs and medicines, particularly those adapted to evil uses and not very well known. I would delve into hypnotism, physiognomy, and make myself a master of the actor's art. I would live in a hundred characters and have as many aliases. When danger menaced one, I would flee to another, or create anew. I would have secret resorts to which I might retreat in case of need. I would surround myself with faithful confederates, experts in their lines. I would employ spies to watch the doings of detectives, that I might avoid coming into actual contact with the police. I would——"

"You would have your hands full," Nick interposed, smiling a bit grimly. "It would take most of your life to make these elaborate preparations."

"Any great work requires most of a man's life."

"Very true."

"And when engaged in a crime?" Whitney said suggestively.

"When about to commit a crime," said Dupont, still gazing steadily at Nick's inscrutable face, "I should plan it with more study, care, and attention to details than the architect devoted to his designs for the Brooklyn Bridge. If it were to be a murder, a burglary, or, for a more simple example, a mere robbery——"

"Say, for instance, my wife's jewels," Whitney put in, with a laugh. "They are in her sleeping room."

"That is coming very near home, my dear Whitney."

"What matters?" Nick put in bluntly. "As well that example as any other."

"Very true." Dupont turned to him with a cynical smile. "But I would not attempt such a robbery without very elaborate preparations."

"Of what nature?"

"I first would establish myself here as a man of wealth, culture, and character. I would win the esteem of all, particularly the friendship of the Whitney's. I would study their habits and temperaments, to learn whether they can be easily influenced and imposed upon. I would note the daily routine of both, their meal hours, when habitually in their apartments, the habits and character of Mrs. Whitney's

maid, and I would learn where the jewels are usually kept."

"A very good beginning, I'm sure," Nick said dryly.

"It might take weeks, possibly months."

"No doubt."

"In the meantime, I would worm myself into Whitney's confidence and get as near to him as possible."

"Very properly, of course."

"Incidentally I should learn that the jewels are not kept in his apartments, but repose for security in the hotel vault, from which they are brought when wanted; also that they are contained in a single red-leather case, specially made for them, and that they are valued at more than three hundred thousand dollars. Hey! what a tidy sum!" Dupont added, with a shrill ripple of laughter. "One well might spend a year to get away with them safely."

"My wife's jewels have a reputation," Whitney said, a bit proudly. "The points you have mentioned might be easily learned."

"To be sure—mere child's play!" Dupont cried vivaciously. "I then should wait for a timely opportunity to commit the crime. That might come to-day, to-morrow, next week, or next month. Come when it might, it must find me ready. I should be watchful, vigilant, prepared to strike on the instant."

From under his drooping lids Nick Carter caught a sharper glint in the speaker's keen eyes, but he did not move or interrupt him.

"Say that it came this week," Dupont continued glibly. "Why not, indeed? You informed me last Monday, Whitney, that your wife is to appear as *Lady Teasle*, in the amateur theatricals for the charity fund."

"I remember."

"At dinner on Tuesday you stated that she had received a superb costume from her tailor, that she would try it on this evening, that she would make up for her part, test the ability of her hairdresser, and select her most appropriate jewels, that she might see precisely how she would look on the night of the play."

"That is true."

"Dear me, what a golden opportunity!" Dupont cried, throwing up both hands. "This is Friday—three days in which to have prepared for the crime. What cannot be done in three days? I will leave it to Carter himself—what better opportunity could be wanted?"

Nick made no reply.

"It really would be absurdly easy, the theft of your cherished jewels," Dupont went on. "There are a hundred ways by which the trick might be turned. Three whole days—think of it!"

"Think of what?" Whitney asked impulsively, frowning.

"Of the ways and means," Dupont noisily asserted, as if carried away with enthusiasm over his own recital. "Who will not sin for a share in such plunder? Who will not err for a fortune, if to be acquired with ease and safety? Your wife's maid might be bribed. The hairdresser might yield to temptation. I might make the one, or both, a willing confederate."

"Nonsense! You are assuming, Dupont——"

"Assuming—that's precisely it!" Dupont cut in quickly. "I am only assuming the crime, a hypothetical case. I point out what I might have done—if I were a crook."

"Well, well, go on!"

"I dined with you this evening, and was invited here to see your wife in the character costume. How good of you, Whitney! How exceedingly helpful!"

"Absurd!"

"We stopped at the office together, while you obtained her jewels from the hotel vault. Who would suspect that the leather case contained such precious plunder! We met Detective Carter on the way—you pointed him out to me."

Nick drew up a little in his chair, with brows drooping.

"I have longed to meet him," Dupont went on, waving his hands expressively. "I have heard he is keen and clever, a peerless detective, a formidable foe. I asked you to introduce me and make our party of two a party of three. What a shrewd move! What crook would have wanted a detective on the scene of his crime? As well clap manacles on one's own wrists! Am I not right, my dear Carter?"

"I hear what you are saying."

"Of course—to be sure! But I have said enough to show how the deed might be done. A window quietly opened when your wife's eyes are averted. The jewel case dropped out and caught by a confederate in the window below. How feasible! How absurdly simple! The trick of a schoolboy! Though arrests might follow, no proofs could be found."

"Possibly not."

"Fortunately, however, my dear Whitney, we know that the jewels are in your wife's chamber," Dupont quickly added, with eyes sparkling. "We drop the

hypothetical and take up the real. Nick Carter saw her take them there. His keen eyes are not to be doubted. How lucky that he is here, that I suggested his coming. Assuming that the jewels have been stolen, which, of course, is absurd—why, why, I leave it to the detective himself. Am I not, my dear Carter, the last man you would suspect?"

Nick answered him instantly and with startling bluntness.

"On the contrary, Dupont, you would be the first."

"The first!"

"Yes."

"Nonsense! Absurd!" Dupont laughed derisively. "You would be wrong, out of your head, all at sea."

"I don't think so," Nick declared, starting up. "Furthermore, Whitney, we'd better make sure at once that the jewels are——"

But it was then that the woman screamed—a shriek of mingled amazement, fright, and dismay.

"Artie! Artie! My jewels—they're gone!"

All recognized the voice of Mrs. Arthur Whitney.

She appeared in the hall while speaking—a tottering, frantic, wild-eyed woman on the verge of fainting. She was superbly dressed. Her powdered hair was arranged in amazing puffs and rolls. Her cheeks were ghastly, save where they were red with rouge, the more vivid from contrast. A bit of black court-plaster flecked her rounded chin and one cheekbone.

Whitney leaped up, nearly as pale as his wife, and ran to her assistance.

Gaston Dupont arose less excitedly, but exclaimed in accents of dismay:

"Her jewels gone! Merciful heavens, what a dreadful coincidence!"

Nick Carter heard him but paid no attention. There was a shrewd gleam in his eyes. He strode through the narrow hall and locked the door of the suite, that leading into the hotel corridor. He removed the key and put it in his pocket.

"I'll see about this master-crook business," he muttered between his teeth. "This man Dupont shall eat his remarks of this evening. Dreadful coincidence, eh? Coincidence be hanged! Not by a long chalk!"

CHAPTER III.

A MYSTERIOUS ROBBERY.

Was it true?

Had Mrs. Arthur Whitney's jewel case, containing three hundred thousand dollars' worth of flawless gems, really been stolen?

Was it, indeed, more than a coincidence—the dramatic recital of Mr. Gaston Dupont?

Had he actually, though indirectly, invited Nick Carter to be there when the crime was committed?

What audacity!

What nerve!

One would say that Dupont must be insane, that he was a novice in crime, an idiot who knew so little about knavery, or so egregiously underestimated the discernment and acumen of the great detective, that he literally thrust his head into the lion's mouth.

There is, however, another way of looking at it.

Who would be less likely to incur serious suspicion, ordinarily, than the man who took this audacious step?

Obviously, he must have felt sure of himself, had absolute confidence in his own ability, knew that his plans were perfectly laid, and would be coolly and skillfully executed.

Plainly, too, he thought he was Nick Carter's equal in perception and sagacity, if not his superior. He crossed swords with him voluntarily. He deliberately invited his attack. In effect, he slapped his face and defied him.

Think of it—slapped the face of Nick Carter and defied him!

There is an advantage, nevertheless, in thus striking the first blow. If well dealt sometimes it knocks the wind out of an antagonist. Looking at it from this standpoint, the move was not, after all, such an egregious blunder.

Though already convinced that Dupont had done more than anticipate the crime, Nick restrained himself from going over the traces with accusations and a bluff which, after the former's audacious display of nerve, he knew would prove futile. Only with absolute evidence could such a man be effectively floored.

As for the gems, Nick had seen the jewel case brought into the suite less than an hour before. He had seen Mrs. Whitney take it into her chamber, followed soon after by her maid, and a little later by the hairdresser.

No one since had left the suite. No other person had entered it. Nick was absolutely sure of these two facts, for he had had an unobstructed view of the entire hall while seated in the parlor.

The sleeping room was on the right of the hall. Adjoining it were a bathroom and a small dressing room. The bed occupied an alcove and was half hidden by a handsomely decorated folding screen. Two windows, with roller shades and fine lace curtains,

overlooked the street, four stories below. Beautiful antique furniture adorned the room, including a massive mahogany bureau, mounted with a broad plate mirror.

It was in this room that Nick rejoined the five other inmates of the suite.

Mrs. Whitney had taken a chair and was sobbing hysterically. Her maid, a slender, red-haired girl, in the twenties, was applying salts and water, and looking very much dazed and dumfounded.

Devereau had withdrawn to one corner, where he stood wringing his hands. He had on a white apron and stiff paper cuffs, enclosing the lower part of his sleeves. He was not an attractive man—but he had, as a hairdresser, a reputation.

Both Whitney and Gaston Dupont were standing near the bureau, the former listening a little impatiently to the latter's earnest protests, which were turned to expressions of regret the moment he heard Nick approaching.

"It is inconceivable—impossible! They cannot have been stolen. They must be here, Whitney, somewhere. I am appalled, absolutely horrified, when I think of all that I have said. The coincidence staggers me. I hope you do not think I meant anything, or suspect me of——"

"No more of that, Dupont," Whitney interrupted, a bit coolly. "You should not forget that I invited you here, and that no gentleman would accuse one regarded as a guest."

"I said suspect, not accuse, my dear Whitney," Dupont replied, with eyes narrowing.

"What I said is equivalent to——"

"Come, come, you waste time," Nick interrupted, after listening for a moment on the threshold. "Are you sure, Whitney, that the jewels are missing? They may be only mislaid, or——"

"No, no, Mr. Carter; they have been stolen. They were——"

"There, there, calm yourself, Bessie," Whitney interposed, the interruption having come from his sobbing wife. "These jewels are not our lives. We can stand the racket, you know, even if they have gone up the spout. Pull yourself together, my dear, and we'll sift the matter to the bottom. Look into it for me, Nick, will you? Your head is better than mine. Handle the affair as you fancy. I turn it over to you."

Nick accepted it—temporarily.

He surprised Dupont by ignoring him for a time, saying a bit brusquely:

"We'll first make sure that the jewels have been stolen. What did you do with them, Mrs. Whitney? I saw you bring them in here."

"I hid them immediately after entering," she replied, governing her agitation.

"Hid them where?"

"In a secret drawer in the bureau, one expressly made to take the jewel case, and known only to my husband and myself. We use it only when the office-vault is not available, or when the jewels are kept here temporarily."

"Since they are gone," said Whitney, "I may as well show you the drawer."

"Stop a bit!" Nick quickly restrained him. "Let me get at this in my own way. Were you alone here when you hid the jewel case, Mrs. Whitney?"

"Yes. It was before Mary, my maid, came in."

"Is there any entrance to this suite except from the hotel corridor?"

"No, sir; only the windows."

"They are forty feet from the ground," said Nick pointedly. "Except your maid and Mr. Devereau, moreover, I know that no person has passed through the hall since we entered. Did you leave this room after hiding the jewels?"

"I did not. After Mary came in, I prepared for Mr. Devereau to dress my hair. I had put on my costume and wore a kimono over it, so did not need to go to my dressing room. After Mr. Devereau had finished I took off the kimono and then wanted my jewels. In order to remove them from the secret drawer unobserved, I sent Mary to put the dressing room in order, the door of which I closed."

"I then was in the bathroom washing the oil from my hands," Devereau explained a bit nervously, stepping forward. "I refer to the hair oil I had been using. I did not hear Mrs. Whitney open the secret drawer, nor have I seen the jewel case since coming here. The loss of it is a mystery, indeed, if what she says is true."

"There is no if, Mr. Devereau, about that," Mrs. Whitney said haughtily.

"Pardon. I did not mean to imply——"

"That is all right, sir. Go on, Mr. Carter."

Devereau drew back and began to remove his cuffs and apron. Nick detected a sinister gleam in his dark eyes, a momentary flash of resentment; but he merely made a mental note of it.

Directly in front of the bureau stood a chair with a straight back, evidently that in which Mrs. Whitney had been seated while having her hair dressed. Among

other articles on the bureau were several brushes and combs, a curling iron, and the bottle of hair oil to which Devereau had referred.

"You were sitting here?" said Nick, pointing to the chair and reverting to Mrs. Whitney.

"Yes, Mr. Carter, and that only adds to the mystery," she replied, quite positively. "As I have said, I did not leave this room after hiding the jewels. I stood before the bureau all the while I was putting on my costume. Mary came in to assist me. I took that chair immediately after Mr. Devereau entered, and occupied it all the time that he was at work on my hair. I did not leave it until, having sent Mary into the dressing room and knowing that Mr. Devereau was in the bathroom, I hastened to open the secret drawer to take out the jewel case."

"It was then that you screamed?"

"Yes, immediately; I was directly in front of the bureau, however, either sitting or standing, from the time I hid the jewels until I discovered the theft," Mrs. Whitney forcibly added. "I cannot conceive how it was committed. It seems absolutely impossible that, from under my very eyes, any person can have removed them. Nevertheless, that must have been done, for the jewels certainly are missing. I am literally dazed by the mystery."

CHAPTER IV.

NICK CARTER DECLARES HIMSELF.

Nick glanced at the articles on the bureau. He was, as a matter of fact, not a little puzzled as to how the theft could have been committed, if what Mrs. Whitney had just said was true.

Furthermore, although he had in mind the recent recital of Dupont, as well as certain points that had led to his own startling assertion that this man was the first he would suspect, Nick did not believe that Dupont, if really responsible for the robbery, had boldly stated just how it had been accomplished. It seemed altogether more probable that the rascal, if such he was, had invented his dramatic story only to hide the true method that had been adopted.

As for Gaston Dupont, in the meantime, he stood leaning against the casing of the door, with his hands thrust into his pockets, and a look of profound sympathy and concern on his attractive, clean-cut face. Apparently he was without the slightest fear that he should be seriously suspected. Nevertheless, Nick detected in his eyes a half-mocking, half-disdainful light, that betrayed a supercilious contempt for his investigations.

"I now will look at that secret drawer, Whitney," he said, approaching the bureau.

"I will show it to you."

"Stop a bit," cautioned the detective. "Let me do the looking. Merely show me where the drawer is located and how it is opened."

Whitney hastened to comply, pointing to one end of the bureau and at a vertical row of small knobs amid the ornamental carving enclosing an end panel, corresponding with those on the rest of the piece.

"The secret drawer is constructed back of the ordinary middle one," Whitney explained. "It can be opened by pressing the tenth little knob, counting down. It closes automatically, Nick, and is not visible when closed. It is a masterpiece of joiner's art."

Nick crouched on the carpet at the end of the bureau, which stood against one of the walls of the room, and presently lighted a match with which to examine the drawer. It was not perceptible, as Whitney had said, the cracks around it being cleverly concealed by the ornamental woodwork.

As the match flamed up more brightly, however, Nick made a discovery that would have escaped most eyes. He saw that the tenth tiny knob glistened slightly, as if moist, and a second sharper glance convinced Nick that the knob had been pressed with an oily thumb, or finger.

Without a change of countenance, however, despite the significance of the discovery, Nick at once pressed the knob with his thumb, so forcibly that he deftly wiped away all signs of the oil, and at the same time caused the drawer to spring out.

"You must take hold of it, Nick, or it will fly back into place," said Whitney, gravely watching him.

Nick grasped the end of the drawer and held it open. It was about twelve inches long, by four wide and six deep. It was entirely empty.

"Does this just hold the jewel case?" he asked, looking up.

"Yes. I had the bureau made expressly for this purpose."

"Who made it?"

"A cabinetmaker named Jones, who promised that he would never reveal the secret. He died about a year ago."

"You assumed that he kept his word, and that the secret died with him?"

"I felt very sure that the existence of the drawer was known only by my wife and myself."

"It is quite evident that somebody else has learned of it," replied Nick, letting the drawer slip back into place and rising to his feet.

"I agree with you. It certainly is most mysterious."

Nick made no reply for several minutes. He began his search which, at the outset, he knew would prove futile. He was convinced that the jewels no longer were in the suite.

Nevertheless, with other designs than that of finding them, he looked in each bureau drawer and examined the wall back of it, also the edges of the carpet, to make sure no tacks had recently been removed.

He brought up, finally, at the two windows, one of which was fastened. The one nearer the bureau, however, was unlocked. Raising the shade, Nick parted the lace curtains and lifted the window to look out.

On the broad stone sill outside was about an inch of light snow, fallen that afternoon. It had not been disturbed. There was no imprint of a hand or finger, as might have been the case if a person had leaned out to drop the jewel case, as had been suggested by Gaston Dupont.

Returning to the other window, Nick found the same light layer of snow outside, and the same conditions.

It was obvious that no person had entered through either window, even if it had been possible to reach them from outside.

All the while, though hardly a word broke the silence, Nick was keeping a furtive eye on the hairdresser; and while at the second window, he saw him make a move that further aroused his suspicion.

Devereau had folded his apron as if preparing to depart. Instead of attempting to do so, however, he gradually edged nearer the bureau, and, when he thought none observed him, he quickly seized the bottle of hair oil and slipped it into his pocket.

Nick saw him, nevertheless, and the fact that the move was made so cautiously was too significant to be ignored.

"Humph!" he mentally ejaculated. "He's mighty anxious to get away with that, all right, and evidently feared Mrs. Whitney might ask for it, if she saw he did not intend leaving it. I reckon it's worth going after, though I'll be hanged if I can see how it can have figured in this affair."

Nick made no audible comments, however. With a look of perplexity that none could doubt, he continued his search for several minutes, looking into each of the rooms and finally remarking, as if in accord with the opinion Whitney expressed:

"It is most mysterious, indeed, as you say; for the jewels certainly have been spirited away by some means. Yet the walls and floor are intact, the windows out of reach, and there appears to be no avenue through which a thief can have entered."

"None, Nick, surely," said Whitney.

"Furthermore, your wife must have seen any person at the drawer, if the theft was committed while she was sitting in front of the beureau. I take it for granted, Mr. Devereau, that you can shed no light on the mystery," added Nick, suavely addressing the hairdresser.

"Indeed, sir, I am as much in the dark as yourself," said Devereau, gravely shaking his head.

"I judge so, of course."

"I feel dreadfully over having been here when such a crime was committed."

"There is no occasion for you to feel badly, Mr. Devereau, if you know nothing about the crime," Nick replied. "What do you say, my girl? Stop a bit! Come here."

Nick surprised all observers by turning abruptly to a table near by, on which a small prayer book was lying, and which he quickly picked up.

"Come here," he repeated, addressing the maid. "Lay your right hand on this book. I want you to swear that you know nothing about this crime."

The girl approached him as if awed, trembling visibly and with a frightened look on her face. She hesitated a moment, gazing apprehensively at the detective's searching eyes, and then she placed her right hand on the book he held for her.

"Now," said Nick; "hold it up."

"Yes, sir, please you," Mary faltered.

"Do you solemnly swear that you know nothing about the removal of these jewels, when the crime was committed, or by whom?" Nick asked sternly.

"Yes, sir." The girl bowed while she spoke. "I swear I know nothing about it."

"That is all," Nick said curtly. "Now, Mrs. Whitney, I wish you to do the same."

The woman bridled quickly, exclaiming resentfully:

"Mr. Carter! How absurd! Swear that I did not rob myself of my own jewels?"

"Oblige me by complying," Nick insisted.

Mrs. Whitney subdued her umbrage and obeyed, placing her right hand on the book, then raising it to swear, as directed.

"Very good," said Nick. "Now, Mr. Devereau, it is your turn."

The hairdresser hastened to obey, but with a covert smile in his somewhat sunken, darkly ringed eyes.

"I do so very willingly, Mr. Carter," he remarked, after the solemn declaration had been made. "Command me, I beg, if I can be of any assistance in solving this mystery. At present, however, I am as much in the dark as yourself."

"Why don't you swear the rest of us?" asked Dupont, speaking for the first time during Nick's investigations. "I shall be glad, too, thus to nullify some of the erroneous impressions I must have made."

"I omit doing so," said Nick, replacing the book on the table, "because neither you nor Whitney can have seen the theft committed."

"That is true enough."

"We three were not in this room at the time. It must have been done when we were in the parlor."

"Yes, surely."

"Nevertheless, Mr. Dupont," Nick added, smiling a bit oddly, "you evidently are endowed with clairvoyance. You forecast this very remarkable crime."

Dupont shrugged his shoulders and met him halfway.

"Yes," he gravely admitted. "It is most unfortunate."

"The crime or your anticipation of it?"

"Both," said Dupont, with the utmost complacency. "I must appear in a very bad light. I regret that we entered into such a discussion, and, more particularly, the conclusion at which you arrived."

"What was that?" Nick inquired, as if he had forgotten it.

"That I am the first person that you would suspect."

"Ah, yes; I remember."

"But I am not a seer, my dear Carter, nor did I for a moment suppose that a robbery had been committed," Dupont went on with apparent candor. "Nevertheless, in view of what has occurred and your assertion, I cannot but feel that you regard me with distrust. That being the case, Detective Carter, I hasten to place myself at your disposal—under immediate arrest, if you think best."

Having heard none of the discussion in the parlor, Mrs. Whitney looked surprised. Her husband stood listening. Obviously, he did not intend to interfere with any move that Nick should make. Plainly enough, he had shifted the delicate responsibility from his own shoulders to those of the detective.

Nick appreciated this, but made the last move that any of them would have expected.

"What I said in the parlor, Mr. Dupont," he gravely answered, "was said upon impulse and when none of us supposed the jewels had been stolen. The actual theft opens up a much broader field."

"Decidedly so," said Dupont, with a look of relief. "I thoroughly agree with you."

"I am not inclined to arrest, nor even suspect, you," Nick suavely added. "The theft is a mysterious one. I cannot at present conceive how it was done. I have not the slightest doubt, however, that the jewels have been stolen and no longer are in these apartments."

"Surely not, or your search would have brought them to light," Dupont coincided. "The jewel case is too large to be easily hidden here."

"Furthermore, what I think about the case is not material, Mr. Whitney, for I shall not undertake to investigate it. What little I already have done, sir, was done only incidentally."

"Good heavens, Nick, don't say that," Whitney cried impulsively. "I would rather have you on the case than any man on earth. You surely don't mean that you are going to drop it?"

"That is precisely what I mean."

"But, man alive, for what reason?"

"Is it too deep for you?" queried Dupont audaciously.

"That's neither here nor there," replied Nick, glancing at him. "Don't overlook the fact, Mr. Whitney, that I was in these apartments when the crime was committed, and that every person here will fall more or less seriously within the circle of general suspicion."

"Do you think so?"

"I do. In view of that, if I were to accept this case and find it too deep for me, as our friend Dupont suggests, malicious persons might sneer at my efforts and hint, even, that I was in league with the thief, if not the thief himself."

"Nonsense!" Whitney forcibly protested. "Who in thunder would think you capable of that? It's utterly absurd!"

"On the contrary, Whitney, there is much truth in it and I feel compelled to ask you to call in other detectives," Nick firmly insisted. "You have a telephone in the parlor. I would advise you to notify the Central Office of the robbery and have detectives sent here without delay."

"This is final, Nick, is it?" Whitney asked, quite astounded.

"Yes, absolutely," said Nick, stepping into the hall and taking his coat and hat. "Really, Whitney, I have no alternative."

"Very well, then. I shall do what you advise."

"First, permit me to wish you good night."

"Good night."

Whitney accepted the detective's hand, shaking it hurriedly, then rushed into the parlor and seized the telephone.

Gaston Dupont had followed them into the hall.

"Indeed, Carter, you're a curious enigma," he said, with his thin red lips curling oddly. "Are you really going?"

"I have an appointment at ten," Nick explained, smiling and slipping on his coat.

"Well, well, I hope we shall meet again."

"I think that is highly probable."

"Speed the day, Detective Carter."

"It will come soon, I imagine."

"What a deplorable termination of our pleasant chat," Dupont said, grinning.

"Yes, very."

"I hope we may renew it some day. I feel dreadfully sorry for Whitney."

"So do I."

"Think of it—three hundred thousand dollars' worth of jewels! Gone in the twinkling of an eye. Really, I am quite depressed. I must do all in my power to assist him. Good night, my dear Carter."

"Good night, Mr. Dupont."

Nick shook hands with him, ignoring the covert leer with which he had been speaking, then turned and departed.

Dupont hastened into the parlor.

Ten minutes later Paul Devereau undertook to leave the suite, but unexpectedly found that his departure must be deferred.

The door was locked and the key missing.

CHAPTER V.

NICK CARTER'S DEDUCTIONS.

It was nine o'clock in the morning, the day following the mysterious theft of the Whitney jewels.

The morning papers were full of it—or as much of it as could be obtained from the police blotter and the Central Office detectives.

Chick Carter, seated alone in the business office in Nick's residence, was absorbed in one of the sensational stories of the crime. He wore a smile of contempt, as if the story was worthy only of his derision. Just as he finished reading it the door opened and Nick Carter entered.

"No word from Patsy?" he asked crisply.

"Not yet," said Chick.

"Nor from Bob Ferret?"

"Nothing doing."

Nick took the chair at his desk and lighted a cigar.

"We soon shall hear from one or the other, depend on it," he said confidently.

He referred to two of his younger assistants. He had summoned both to the hotel by telephone immediately after leaving Whitney's suite the previous night. They had arrived within ten minutes, before it was discovered that the door of the suite was locked; and, before any person could depart, both were ready for the work Nick quickly had assigned them.

"The papers are out with their hammers," said Chick, laying aside the sheet.

"Knocking me?"

"Yes."

"How so?"

"They cannot see how such a robbery could have been committed while you were in the next room."

"Can't, eh? Well, they can't see far along those lines."

"They wonder, too, at your having dropped the case," said Chick, with an expressive grin. "It is hinted that you must have thought the mystery too deep for you to successfully tackle, after briefly looking into it, and that you shouldered inevitable failure off your own back and upon those of the Central Office men."

Nick laughed, and blew a ring of smoke at his inkstand.

"That's what comes of having a reputation," said he. "I'm content, Chick, with having convinced them that I dropped the case—or, more particularly, that mole in the ground, Gaston Dupont. That fellow, Chick, is certainly a scamp worthy of our steel. Take my word for it, he's as slick a knave as trots around in leather. I'm not half sure that I fooled him, after all. He's as audacious, clever, and discerning as he pictured himself, I'll wager."

"You think he boldly drew a picture of his own character, eh?"

"Nothing less."

"And actually seized the opportunity to have you present when the robbery was committed?"

"That's what," Nick nodded. "He made it a point

to impress that fact upon me, evidently assuming that I then would not think of suspecting him. But he's our man, Chick, all right, provided we can secure the evidence with which to down him. One point alone would convince me that he is responsible for this crime, and that his bluff recital was not a coincidence."

"What point is that?"

"The noise he made, his laughter and drumming on the table, while he was talking. That was done, Chick, in order that none of us could hear the window raised in Mrs. Whitney's chamber, nor the click of the secret drawer when it sprang open."

"H'm, clever, indeed!"

"I was wise to that just before he finished," Nick added; "and that was why I declared that he was the first I should suspect, and at once started to make sure the jewels were safe. I was just a bit too late, for Mrs. Whitney screamed at that moment. The trick had been turned while Dupont was talking."

"The jewels were passed out of the window?"

"Undoubtedly."

"By Devereau?"

"I am absolutely sure of that."

"Why not by Mary Bowen, or Mrs. Whitney herself, assuming her guilty of duplicity?"

"There would have been evidence of it," said Nick.

"Evidence of it?"

"That secret drawer was opened by a person whose finger was smeared with oil. Naturally, the jewel case was removed and disposed of by the same person. Obviously, the hairdresser was the first to invite suspicion, for he had been handling hair oil."

"Certainly."

"It might be, nevertheless, that either Mrs. Whitney or her maid had held the bottle, or touched the former's hair after it was oiled, thus soiling their fingers. I very easily eliminated them from suspicion."

"How so?"

"As you know, Chick, oil leaves a glossy appearance on the skin, particularly the finger nails. I got a good look at their hands, both the nails and the balls of their fingers, by compelling them to place their hands on a prayer book and then hold them up and swear they knew nothing about the crime. There was not a sign of oil on the hand of either woman."

"But you saw only the right hand."

"Very true. The secret drawer is so located, however, that only the right hand can be easily used to open it and remove the jewel case. The left surely would not have been used when engaged in the theft."

"I see the point."

"I reckon that move, at least, fooled Gaston Dupont, even."

"The swearing of all?"

"Yes."

"Most likely. 'Twas very clever, for fair," Chick allowed. "Plainly, then, Devereau was the man who turned the trick."

"As sure as death and taxes."

"What puzzles me, Nick, is why Mrs. Whitney did not detect it," Chick rejoined a bit doubtfully. "She is positive about being in the room all the time, you say, and was seated in front of the bureau most of the time. How could the secret drawer have been opened, also one of the windows, and the jewel case dropped out, or thrown out, without her seeing it? She must have been asleep, hypnotized, or in some such condition."

"That is a question we have to answer," said Nick. "I am sure, at least, that Devereau was the chief figure in the actual work of committing the crime. I saw, too, that he made it a point to get away with his bottle of hair oil. That's why, after pretending to drop the case, I summoned Patsy, and put him on the track of the hairdresser. I want part of the oil that was left in that bottle."

"For what purpose?"

"I'll explain, if Patsy succeeds in getting it undetected," smiled Nick. "As an additional move, I ordered Bob Ferret to watch Dupont after he left the suite, and to shadow him when out of the hotel. If he was the big finger in this job, as I now suspect, there will be a meeting of him and his confederates sooner or later, and it's up to Bob Ferret to discover who they are and what comes off."

"Dan Foley, the Central Office man, thinks he has sized up the case," said Chick, taking up the newspaper again. "He got next to something you seemed to overlook."

"Overlook, eh?" Nick replied, with a laugh. "Does the paper state what he found?"

"Yes. I'll read it to you."

"Listen, instead," Nick interposed. "I haven't mentioned it before, for it's not worth considering—from Foley's standpoint."

"Let it come."

"Not because Gaston Dupont spoke of the feasibility of dropping the jewel case from a window, to be caught by a confederate in the room below, but because I knew the windows to be the only way by

which the jewels could have been removed from the suite, I made it a point to look into the rooms both below and above Mrs. Whitney's chamber. Don't imagine for a moment, Chick, that I think Dupont stated all the facts."

"You visited the other rooms, then?"

"Yes. I did so immediately after giving Bob and Patsy my instructions," said Nick. "I found that the suite under Whitney's is occupied by Doctor Richard Volney and his wife. I know him personally, and his honor is above question. The couple were alone in their rooms all of the evening, moreover, and no crook could possibly have been there."

"That settles the suite below," Chick allowed.

"In effect, the same is true of that on the fifth floor, or directly over Whitney's. It is occupied by two maiden ladies, sisters of Doctor Ordway, the Baptist clergyman. Both were at home all of last evening and assured me that no one else had been in their room."

"That ought to be good enough."

"It was," said Nick.

"Did you look farther?"

"You bet!"

"Up to the sixth floor, eh?"

"Sure thing," Nick nodded. "I knew the jewels must have been disposed of through a window. Only a fool, however, would have thrown them down to the street. Having made sure that the nearest windows above and below had not been used, I went up one more story. A rope may be easily lowered, you know, but it is quite impossible to reach up very high with anything but a ladder."

"That's right, too, Nick."

"In a room on the sixth floor, directly over Mrs. Whitney's chamber, I found enough to clinch my suspicions, and to convince me that the crooks had inadvertently gone lame. I judge, however, that Dan Foley swallowed what he saw there. He thinks the thief was lowered down to Mrs. Whitney's chamber, and that he contrived to enter through one of the windows and steal the jewels, doesn't he?"

"Yes, after watching through the window until he was sure where she hid them," Chick nodded. "That's precisely his opinion, as quoted here."

"Well, it's wrong, though the one the crooks aimed to create," Nick said dryly. "Foley only jumped at a conclusion. Was it he who led the Central Office squad?"

"Yes. What did you find in the room, Nick, that gave you an opposite opinion?"

"My opinion was formed by what I found outside of the room, rather than in it," Nick answered. "I was in the room half an hour ahead of the Central Office men. I entered it with a picklock, after having learned that it had been occupied by a transient, registered as Thomas Tobey, Chicago, who had paid in advance and had not been seen since dinner. I took it for granted, Chick, that he would never be seen again—unless we contrive to lay hands on him."

"Stranger things have happened," Chick put in, laughing.

"He had occupied the room four days, or since last Tuesday," Nick went on. "Bear in mind, Chick, that it was on Tuesday that Whitney told Dupont of his wife's intention to try on her costume last evening, as well as receive her hairdresser and select from among her jewels those most appropriate for the costume and the event."

"Yes, it's very significant," Chick agreed. "What did you find in the room?"

"I found the window open, and near it tracks of muddy boots on the carpet, also that the latter was still damp, as if snow had been tracked in there."

"Foley mentions that."

"In the baseboard directly under the window was a large screw eye, more than an inch in diameter and easily capable of sustaining a man's weight. It had been used, however, only to secure one end of several bed slats, tightly bound together with marline. This improvised piece of joist extended out of the window, resting on the sill and stone outside, and the inner end was held fast with a stout rope reaved through the screw eye."

"I understand."

"Tied to the outer end of the bundle of slats was a pulley block, with a long rope running through it, to one end of which was attached a sling seat such as is used by steeple-jacks, or sailors when scraping a mast. The rope and seat appeared to have been recently used, but they had been hauled into the room and left lying on the floor."

"Most of those things are mentioned in Foley's report," Chick nodded. "He thinks the thief was lowered to Mrs. Whitney's window by confederates, who were with him in the room on the sixth floor."

"The more fool Foley," said Nick. "That contrivance was rigged only to mislead the police, to convince them that the thief entered from outside, as Foley has inferred, despite Mrs. Whitney's assertion that she did not leave the room after hiding the jewels."

"It does seem strange."

"There was only one crook in that room on the sixth floor, Chick, take my word for it," Nick added confidently. "He was acting under Gaston Dupont's instructions, moreover. That tricky rascal had the evidence in that room faked with still another object."

"To divert suspicion from Devereau?"

"Exactly. If the theft was attributed to crooks at work from the sixth floor, it is reasonable to suppose that Devereau would not be suspected."

"Certainly," Chick admitted. "Still, if Devereau removed the jewel case from the secret drawer, he must have got rid of it in some way."

"Yes, very simply."

"Do you know how?"

"Precisely how," said Nick. "I discovered that while looking out of a window of the suite occupied by the Ordway sisters, which they kindly permitted me to do."

"What did you find?"

"On the broad stone outside of all of the front windows," Nick proceeded to explain; "was about an inch of light snow. It fell early yesterday evening. It was a contingency on which Dupont, even, had not figured; or, if it occurred to him, he had neither the time nor the opportunity to change his plans."

"I see."

"If Foley had looked a little deeper into the evidence, he would have found that the snow on the stone outside of both of Mrs. Whitney's chamber windows had not been disturbed. Obviously, Chick, a thief could not have got in and out of the window, from so uncertain a perch as a swinging seat, without resting upon the stone and disturbing the snow."

"By Jove, that's right. He would have left his tracks, surely."

"More likely, he would have brushed off nearly all the snow on the stone," Nick said dryly. "That had been done on the sixth floor. In the snow outside the window on the fifth floor, however, the one directly over Mrs. Whitney's chamber, I found a small portion covered with criss-cross lines. That confirmed a suspicion I already had formed."

"What was that?"

"Plainly enough, Chick, they were left by a small wicker basket which, swinging slightly while it was being lowered, touched the light snow on the stone and left its impression."

"Ah, I see!" cried Chick. "The crook on the sixth floor lowered a basket as far as Mrs. Whitney's window, and Devereau reached out and dropped the jewel case into it."

"That's about the size of it," Nick grimly nodded. "And that, Chick, was all that was lowered from that floor, as sure as you're a foot high. The rest of the rigging was only a blind, set up with the designs I have mentioned."

"By Jove! I guess you're right."

"I know I'm right," Nick declared confidently. "The crook then hauled up the basket and bolted with the jewels, also with the basket and line he had used, that the real truth might not be suspected."

"Could he be traced?"

"I could find none of the hotel help who had seen a man leaving with a basket. He may have wrapped it in paper before going."

"Most likely," Chick allowed. "There is still one point, Nick. How can Devereau have learned about the secret drawer?"

"That still is an open question, Chick," Nick replied, "It may be that the maid is in the game, and that she had discovered the drawer by watching Mrs. Whitney at a time when the jewels were in the room. That's a minor point, at present."

"Very true."

"For the most part, Chick, that is how the trick was turned," Nick resumed. "You can bet your year's income on it, also that Gaston Dupont was the man who planned it. I'm ready to wager, in fact, that he is nothing less than the big chief of a secret gang of exceedingly clever crooks—precisely in a line with what he said last evening."

"It looks so, surely."

"It is one thing to feel sure of this, however, but quite another to be able to prove it," said Nick. "Immediate arrests are out of the question. They would be the worst move we could make."

"Before doing anything of that kind," Chick said gravely; "we must get on the track of the jewels. They're worth a barrel of money."

"Yes, and their recovery is most imperative."

"Right you are."

"In order to blind Dupont and lead him to think he had blinded me, I pretended to throw up the case," said Nick. "While making my subsequent investigations, moreover I cautioned all with whom I talked against exposing me."

"A wise precaution."

"I don't believe Dupont will be able to pick up my trail, but will believe the case to be entirely in

charge of the Central Office. That being so, I'll finally land this rascal, Chick, if it takes me until——"

"Holy smoke!" Chick interrupted, starting up to peer through the figured screen in the front window. "By Jove! judging from your description, Nick, this should be Dupont himself."

A superb automobile, the honk horn of which Chick had heard, had stopped directly in front of the house.

Nick arose and looked out.

Alighting from the tonneau, clad in the height of fashion, looking as fresh and wholesome as if just from a bath and the hands of his valet, came Mr. Gaston Dupont.

"You're right, Chick," Nick muttered. "It's the rascal himself."

"Gee! But he's a good looker, for fair!"

"Yes, he looks all right, as far as that goes. You pretend to be engaged over our mail and leave me to receive him. That's his chauffeur, I judge. A sinister face, indeed! We'll fix it in mind."

Nick felt more interest in Dupont's chauffeur just then, in fact, than in Dupont himself.

He was the only other occupant of the splendid car. He sat muffled to the ears in an expensive fur coat. Out of the collar of it, however, protruded a bullet-shaped head, with close cropped black hair; a square-jawed, hard-featured face, with brows beetling above a pair of narrow, crafty gray eyes; a broad, inflexible mouth, with lips that looked nearly as thin as a scarlet ribbon.

"I've heard that his name is Patrick Kennedy," Nick quietly added. "We'll remember that, also."

"You bet!" Chick muttered, as he returned to his office desk.

Dupont had rung the doorbell noisily—as noisily as he had sketched his ideal of a master crook the previous night.

CHAPTER VI.

A COLOSSAL BLUFF.

Nick Carter did not keep his visitor waiting. He signed for the servant to admit him immediately.

Dupont brought in the freshness of the crisp March morning. He entered with a smile, throwing open his rich fur coat and removing his gloves, to extend a hand which Nick politely arose and accepted.

"So glad I find you in," Dupont said glibly. "I little thought when we parted last evening, my dear Carter, that we should meet so soon."

"Nor I, quite so soon," Nick answered, waving him to a chair. "To tell the truth, Dupont, I'm somewhat surprised at it."

"Ah, indeed!" Dupont laughed. "I'll explain presently."

"If you please."

"You are such a curious fellow, Carter. Really, I find it very difficult to fathom you."

"Others, also, have had the same difficulty."

"I will say, in perfect frankness, too, that you're the deepest man I've ever met," Dupont graciously asserted, paying little or no attention to Nick's remarks. "What a trick you played on us, to be sure. I ought not forgive you."

"What trick was that?" Nick inquired, content to let the scamp run on in his own fashion, aware that a knave will sometimes hang himself if given rope enough. "I don't recall any trick, Mr. Dupont."

"That of slipping out of Whitney's suite and locking the rest of us in it," cried Dupont, still laughing. "Ah, you clever dog, you meant that none of us should get away before the Central Office men arrived. I smelt the rat in the meal, my dear Carter, the moment I learned that the door was locked and the key gone. Really, really, Carter, you're a crafty fellow."

"I'm glad you think so well of me," said Nick, smiling despite himself at Dupont's audacious nerve.

"I do, indeed, I assure you," Dupont nodded vigorously. "I think, however, that you were dreadfully lame last evening."

"Is that so?" returned Nick. "In what way?"

"In dropping this case and leaving it to the Central Office men," Dupont explained glibly. "Before they had been at work ten minutes, I felt sure they would accomplish nothing."

"Indeed?"

"Really, Carter, you shouldn't have done it. A sharper man, one of your own discernment and sagacity, is needed on this case. I have called this morning only to try to persuade you to take it up again."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, indeed, on my word," Dupont asserted, with an unblushing display of candor. "I should not have ventured doing so, my dear Carter, if I had not thought of several points that may be of some assistance to you."

"Ah! I see."

"I feel such a profound sympathy for the Whitneys," Dupont plunged on in his smooth fashion. "I said to myself, if Carter knows my views and is in-

formed of the several points that have occurred to me, he may consent to devote his superior energies to running down the thief and recovering the jewels. I hope you will, my dear Carter. I hate to feel that there is not one master detective, at least, at work on the case."

"Great guns!" thought Chick, listening. "He's got a crust, for fair. It's a mile thick."

"One master detective, eh?" smiled Nick. "As a foil for a master crook?"

"Ah! now you are knocking me," cried Dupont, laughing cheerfully and playfully shaking his finger at Nick. "Really, really, Carter, that's very foolish. I know you don't think me a lunkhead, a numbskull."

"Oh, no, not at all, Dupont. Far from it," Nick added dryly.

"Only an idiot, if contemplating such a crime, would have gabbled on as I did last evening," said Dupont. "That was a coincidence, pure and simple. Bear in mind that it was not I who selected the jewel robbery as an exemplification of my previous remarks. That was done at Whitney's suggestion."

"Yes, I remember, now that you mention it."

"Furthermore, if I were guilty of such knavery, such abominable treachery, I surely would not try to retain you on the case. You, my dear Carter, of all men!"

"Not unless, by so doing, you aimed to avert suspicion," Nick argued, a bit pointedly.

"Pouf! Pah! Tish and tush!" Dupont glibly exclaimed, still laughing. "Really, Carter, there's nothing in that. I don't fear suspicion—not even your own, if you really have any."

"Oh, I'm not bothering with the case."

"That's the very trouble," Dupont cried shrilly. "All I want is to aid the Whitneys, and to have the best possible man on the case. That's you, my dear Carter, and I hope you'll reconsider the matter and yield to my solicitation."

"Have you seen the morning papers, Dupont?"

"Yes, to be sure."

"You know, then, what the Central Office men suspect."

"Yes, and how absurd," cried Dupont. "How could a thief have entered Mrs. Whitney's window without disturbing the snow on the stone outside? What nonsense, to think that a crook could have been lowered from the sixth story, could watch her hide the jewels, could open the window and secure them, afterward getting away as he had come—all, my dear Carter, while we were in the next room; and while Mrs. Whitney, according to her own story, was constantly in the chamber. Such a theory, Carter, would drive any man to seeking your assistance."

"Can you suggest a better one?" Nick blandly asked.

"I should hope so," Dupont declared.

"What is it?"

"Isn't it far more probable that some one already in the room removed the jewels? It now is known there were crooks on the sixth floor. A bag, or basket, might have been lowered to Mrs. Whitney's window. It would have been very easy to reach out and drop the jewel case into it."

"Yes, of course."

"Devereau possibly knew where it was," Dupont suavely went on; "and may have done the job. I suggested that last evening, you remember, before the crime was committed. Or it may have been done by the maid, Mary Bowen."

"Yes, possibly."

"There is still another—but I suggest this with much regret and in strict confidence," Dupont added, with a mournful headshake.

"What is that?" Nick inquired, curious to learn to what audacious extremes the rascal would venture.

"I refer to Mrs. Whitney herself," said Dupont. "She took the jewels into her room. She is the one person who, so far as we know, was alone in there. She may be in trouble of some kind, or in great need of money, and may have conspired to have her jewels stolen, only in order to secretly raise money on them. She could easily have turned the trick, my dear Carter. What do you think of it? Has that occurred to you?"

"Yes, I have thought of it."

"And what is your opinion?"

"I should not overlook her, Dupont, if I was investigating the case," Nick replied.

"Ah! I felt sure of it."

"Perhaps," said Nick, with rather sinister intonation; "you are equally sure in regard to something of much greater importance. If that were so, Dupont, I might consent to take on this case again, as you desire."

"Hey! that would be capital," Dupont cried quickly. "Hasten, my dear Carter. To what matter do you refer?"

"Assuming that Mrs. Whitney tells the truth, that she hid the jewels and did not leave the room until after the theft—tell me how the robbery was committed, Dupont, without her knowledge."

Dupont's eyes flashed sharply for an instant, but they did not shrink from the searching gaze of the detective. He shrugged his shoulders and sat silent for several moments, and then cried abruptly:

"That beats me, Carter, on my word. I cannot imagine how it was done."

"Nor can I," said Nick. "And for that reason, Dupont, I have dropped the case. If Mrs. Whitney conspired in the theft of her own jewels, I want nothing to do with the affair."

The smile returned to Dupont's white, clean-cut face. He nodded thoughtfully and admitted:

"There is something in that, my dear Carter."

"I think so."

"Still, that is only one contingency, one very remote possibility," Dupont argued persuasively. "Eliminating that, there is every reason why you should take up the case."

"Do you think so?"

"I do, indeed."

"Well, I will consider it for a day or two."

"Ah! I'm delighted to hear you say so," Dupont quickly cried, rising to go. "I hope you will consent. If you decide to do so, call and see me. A conference with me might be of help to you—even to you, my dear Carter."

"Yes, possibly," said Nick blandly.

"Call, then, when you will," Dupont chuckled and nodded. "My suite is 341, third floor front. I am invariably there until noon. Really, my dear Carter, I hope you will take up this work."

"If I do," said Nick, rising and confronting him; "I'll tell you one thing, Dupont."

"Yes? What is that?"

"I will, as surely as you are looking me in the eye, recover the jewels and land the thief in prison."

"Magnificent! I'm delighted to hear it!" Dupont cried quickly, seizing Nick's hand. "That's precisely why I want you on the case. Speed the day, my dear Carter. I hope to hear from you soon, very soon, I assure you."

"You shall hear promptly, Dupont, if I decide to accept the case."

"Capital! I'm delighted!" Dupont bowed himself to the door. "I really feel that my visit has been a success. Return it soon, I beg of you. Suite 341, third floor front. So glad to have seen you again, my dear Carter. Good morning. Good morning."

And Mr. Gaston Dupont, bowing and smiling, graciously waving both hands to restrain Nick from the trouble of seeing him to the door, vanished into the hall and departed.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" Chick exclaimed, after hearing the bang of the outer door. "Isn't he the limit? What do you make of it, Nick?"

"A bluff, Chick, pure and simple."

"Do you think so?"

"Nothing else," Nick declared, with an ugly gleam in his eyes. "I told you he was clever. The rascal suspected why I locked the door at the suite. I did it only to prevent him and Devereau from leaving before I could put Patsy and Bob on their trails. He knew, Chick, that my dropping the case was only a bluff—and the rascal has called it."

"But why the dickens did he persuade you to take the case, Nick, if he knows you still are at work on it?" Chick demanded perplexedly.

"He has bluffed back at me," Nick growled. "I should have put it that way. This is a rascal who wouldn't call a hand until his last chip was played in. He knows Foley was lame. He knows, too, that I must have sized up the evidence correctly, and he came here to fling the truth squarely at me, as if he had deduced it, also, thinking thus to blind me to his part in the game, as well as lead me to suspect Mrs. Whitney."

"Well, that's nerve, Nick, for fair," said Chick, now seeing the point. "One would hardly expect a crook to show his whole hand."

"He has not shown the whole of it, Chick, and that's the worst feature."

"What do you mean?"

"Just this," Nick grimly rejoined. "We've heard nothing from Bob, who should have been shadowing Dupont since last night. We have heard nothing from Patsy, who was instructed to follow Devereau, and secretly get, if possible, that bottle of hair oil, or a portion of it. I now fear there's a very good reason for their silence—or a very bad one."

"You think Dupont suspected your designs?"

"Exactly. It looks very much as if both might be in trouble. If not, they could have telephoned, at least."

"That's true, Nick."

"I didn't like the laugh of that rascal when he said I had tricked him. It smacked of mockery and secret exultation. Get into a rig of some sort, Chick, and we'll see what can be learned."

"What's your scheme?" Chick asked, starting up.

"You visit Devereau's place in disguise. See if he is there this morning, and what more you can dis-

cover. If he's there, Patsy must have slipped up in some way, or we should have heard from him. See what you can learn."

"I understand," Chick nodded.

"In the meantime, I'll seek Bob at the hotel," Nick added. "I can't fathom why he hasn't phoned and reported this move by Dupont."

"He may have made a slip, as well as Patsy."

"We'll soon see. If neither can be located, we shall have more on our hands than I have bargained for."

CHAPTER VII.

HELD UP.

They were fine-spun threads, indeed, from which Nick Carter had formed his estimate of Gaston Dupont, and his theory concerning the theft of the Whitney jewels. In view of Mrs. Whitney's testimony, her positive assertion that she had not left her chamber after hiding the jewels, it was still a mystery how they could have been stolen; and the suggestions of Dupont, that she was the one and only person who had had an opportunity to remove them, and that she might have some serious incentive to such duplicity, would ordinarily have been of weight.

Nick felt sure of his deductions, however, and that the recovery of the jewels was of chief importance. He realized, too, that arrests might ruin all, if made before absolute evidence was secured, and it was after this that he set forth with Chick that morning, both very carefully disguised.

It was eleven o'clock when Nick arrived at the hotel, and, despite his misgivings, he had no trouble in finding Bob Ferret. Proceeding to the third floor, he discovered him in the livery of one of the hall-boys, which he had obtained from the hotel manager, whom Nick had let into the secret.

Though a shrewd, keen-eyed young chap, Bob Ferret did not at once recognize Nick, as he sauntered through the quiet, dimly lighted corridor in which the young detective was loitering, constantly with his eye on the door of Dupont's apartments.

Nick stopped short when they met, however, asking quietly:

"Well, what do you say?"

"Holy smoke!" Bob muttered. 'Is it you, chief?"

"Yes. Why haven't you reported?"

"Reported what?"

"Have you been asleep?"

"Asleep!" Bob looked surprised and indignant. "Say, chief, what are you handing out?"

"Where is Dupont?"

"In his rooms. I reckon he isn't up yet. He hasn't been out, I'll bet on that."

"You will, eh?" Nick said dryly. "Well, you'd lose your bet. He was in my office less than an hour ago. Came there in his auto."

Bob looked staggered.

"Say, is that right?" he asked, staring. "On my word, chief, I haven't been out of sight of his door since early morning. I got a little sleep last night, after making sure he was in to stay, and was on duty again at daylight. Gee! I don't see how he got out, chief, on the level."

Nick knew that Bob Ferret would not misrepresent matters, also that Dupont could not easily have escaped his vigilance.

"Tell me what he did last evening," he said.

"He did not leave Whitney's suite until twelve o'clock," Bob earnestly replied. "He went to a room on the sixth floor, in company with Dan Foley and two other Central Office men, where they found——"

"I know what they found," Nick interposed. "Did Dupont return to Whitney's rooms?"

"Yes, and stayed there until the whole bunch left," Bob nodded.

"That was about twelve o'clock?"

"Yes. Dupont then came to his own rooms, where his valet joined him. He's a Frenchy-looking chap, named Cliquot."

"So I've heard."

"They were together about half an hour. Then the valet came out and went into his own room. It's only a single room between Dupont's suite and that side corridor. After the lights in both rooms went out, chief, I thought it safe to snatch a wink of sleep, which I had down in the office. But I was hanging round here again at daylight, on my word, and I haven't laid eyes on either one of them."

"H'm, there's something under the surface," Nick quietly growled. "You keep an eye on this corridor, while I look into the mystery. Sneeze twice if you hear any one coming."

Bob merely nodded in reply.

Nick walked on through the long corridor, passing the door of Dupont's suite and halting at a narrow, divergent corridor and stairway, which evidently led down to a side door of the hotel. He then saw that the door of Cliquot's room was in the side cor-

ridor, out of view from the other, and he decided that he had solved the mystery.

Returning to his assistant, however, Nick found that Bob had learned from the hotel manager that there was no door between Dupont's suite and the side room occupied by his valet—a fact that promptly knocked the legs from under Nick's solution of the mystery.

"Curious!" he muttered. "I thought Dupont might have slipped out through his valet's room."

"It can't be done," said Bob. "I made sure to guard against that, chief, when I saw that the rooms are entered from different corridors."

"Do you know whether Cliquot has left his room this morning?"

"I don't think he has. I've been keeping an eye on both corridors, as well as possible, though chiefly on this one."

"That's proper," Nick assented. "If Cliquot still is in there, however, he could not hear me in Dupont's suite. I want a look at it, knowing him to be out. You stand near the side corridor, with an eye on both, and detain Cliquot if he comes out of his room and turns toward the door of Dupont's."

"I'm wise," Bob nodded. "Leave him to me."

"Also signal me, in case Dupont shows up in this corridor," Nick added. "I'm going to take a chance and have a look at his belongings."

"I questioned the chambefmaid and learned that she puts his suite in order late in the afternoon. She says he's seldom up before noon."

"Well, he was up bright and early this morning, I'll swear to that," Nick said grimly, as they parted.

He waited until Bob Ferret had reached the station assigned him. Then, after a sharp glance through the main corridor, Nick stole quickly to Dupont's door and, after a moment, opened it noiselessly with a pick-lock. Stepping into the narrow hall leading into the suite, he set the door ajar, that he might hear any warning signal.

After listening briefly, Nick felt sure the suite was deserted. He found the parlor handsomely furnished and in good order. To the left of it were a bedroom and bathroom, and he entered the former.

The window was partly open. The bed had not been made. A few pieces of wearing apparel had been carelessly thrown down, as if Dupont had departed hurriedly. Near one of the walls stood two large trunks. Approaching the nearer one, Nick vainly attempted to open it, then knelt in front of it and drew a ring of small skeleton keys from his pocket.

Before he could select one, however, their faint jingle was mingled with a sound that brought Nick to his feet as if electrified.

It was a single sharp, metallic click, as when the hammer of a pistol is raised.

Turning like a flash, Nick found himself covered with a revolver.

In the open door of a wardrobe closet, forming part of the wall between Dupont's bedroom and that of his valet, stood the valet himself, Peter Cliquot, with the weapon leveled at the detective's head.

Nick took his measure at a glance—a lithe, dark, sharp-eyed fellow in the thirties, with as threatening a look just then as one would wish to view, when backed by a loaded revolver.

Nick had not a doubt of the fellow's identity, and, though a bit startled, several thoughts flashed with lightning-like rapidity through his mind.

One, that Cliquot could safely shoot him and escape punishment by claiming to have found him at one of the trunks, and to have thought him a thief.

Another, that further concealment of his suspicion and designs was, in so far as this man was concerned, out of the question.

A third, that his own success in this matter, as well as his personal safety, depended upon getting the best of the valet by some hook or crook.

On the instant, therefore, Nick seized the bull by the horns and was the first to speak.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, shrinking as if alarmed. "Don't shoot! What's your game with that gun?"

Cliquot stood motionless in the closet doorway, covering Nick with undeviating aim. He hardly could have missed him, in fact, for they were scarce six feet apart.

"You'll find out what my game is, if you move again," he answered, in whispers as sharp and threatening as the hiss of an adder.

"Oh, I'll not move," replied Nick, pretending to pull himself together.

"You'd better not."

"I didn't know you were here, or I'd have knocked."

"I'll do the knocking—when the time comes."

"You're Mr. Dupont's valet, ain't you?" Nick asked innocently, pretending to miss the point of the last and striving meantime, to hit upon some safe way of putting his hands on the threatening scamp. "I thought

you'd gone out, or were in your own room. Mr. Dupont said you might not be here. That's why he gave me his key."

Cliquot glared incredulously.

"What key?"

"Of his rooms, of course," Nick coolly asserted. "I'm to leave it in the office when I go out. How'd you think I got in—through a window?"

"You got in easier than you'll get out," Cliquot sharply retorted.

"What's that for? He sent me here," Nick insisted, detecting a shadow of uncertainty in the fellow's eyes, despite his steady weapon.

"Who sent you?"

"Mr. Dupont."

"For what?"

"To fit a key to his trunk; I'm a locksmith," said Nick. "He stopped in his automobile at my shop on Third Avenue an hour ago—that's right. You needn't scowl. He said he'd lost the key to one of his trunks, and sent me to fit another and leave it here. That's why I was at the trunk when you showed up. I——"

"Cut it out!" Cliquot hissed sharply. "You're lying."

Nick saw that the story had absolutely no weight with the valet, yet he kept on talking, waiting only a chance to safely attack the fellow.

"No, I'm not," he quickly protested. "I'm giving it to you straight. I came here only to——"

"Back up to that trunk and sit down," snapped Cliquot, with a threatening lunge with his weapon.

"Hold on," pleaded Nick. "Here are——"

"Back up, I say!"

"Here are the keys I brought. They should prove to your satisfaction that I came only to——"

Nick never finished.

He saw Cliquot's threatening gaze drop for an instant to the hand he extended, still holding the ring of keys, and he wanted no better opportunity.

His right foot shot upward like a flash, with unerring aim, and met Cliquot's wrist with a violence that nearly broke it. The revolver flew to the ceiling. Its fall upon the floor was mingled with Cliquot's wolfish snarl, when Nick, with the bound of a leopard, closed with him and seized him by the throat.

Both men surged into the closet under the terrific onset.

Instead of bringing up at the white, plastered wall within, however, against which Nick designed to pin his man, both plunged headlong through a loose sheet of cotton cloth, and through an opening over which it hung, and landed with a crash upon the floor of—the closet in Cliquot's chamber!

Nick's head struck the casing of the door, and he lost hold on the valet.

Cliquot, with teeth snapping like those of a vicious dog, quickly wriggled aside and turned on his hip. Then, whipping out a knife, he aimed a blow at Nick's throat.

The gleam of the blade caught the detective's eye.

He evaded the point, but the edge slashed his collar. Half an inch to one side, it would have severed his jugular vein. The peril dispelled his momentary daze and brought him to time. As Cliquot's hand drew back to repeat the blow, Nick's iron fist leaped forward.

It caught Cliquot squarely on the point of the chin, and the valet dropped upon the floor as if felled by a lightning stroke.

Nick saw that he was down and out for several minutes, at least, and he hastened to call Bob Ferret into the room, then closed and locked the door of Dupont's apartments.

"Great guns!" Bob exclaimed, upon seeing Cliquot senseless on the floor. "I thought I heard something drop, chief, and was just going to sneak in here to see if you were O. K. This fellow is the valet."

"Yes, I judged so," Nick said grimly. "Handcuff him. He'll make no stir when he comes to and finds he's done for. We must get rid of him before Dupont returns, or the trick will be off. Look lively!"

"He's fast, chief, all right. How the deuce did you get into this room?"

"Through that hole cut between the two closets."

"Gee! that explains the whole business."

"Yes, very plainly," said Nick. "It provides a secret way for Dupont to come and go. The hotel

hands evidently know nothing about it, for the rascals probably keep both closet doors locked when other persons are in the room. They have a sheet hanging over the hole, and I failed to see the opening after this scamp held me up."

"Gracious! He held you up, did he?"

"Yes," replied Nick, briefly stating what had occurred. "Now, you slip out and find a policeman. Bring him in the side door and up to this room. We'll rush this scamp to the station and put him through the third degree when convenient. I reckon we shall find him close-mouthed, however. Look lively, Bob, for we must be rid of him before Dupont shows up."

Bob vanished as if shot from a gun.

Stepping into Dupont's suite, Nick pocketed Cliquot's revolver, then readjusted the sheet that served to mask the hole cut between the two closets. It was a rough job, only, the plaster and lathes having been cut away and removed, forming an opening about five feet high and three in width. Though he knew they must be evil, Nick could not conjecture for what uses it was designed.

Cliquot recovered while the detective was thus engaged, but, as Nick expected, the scowling rascal refused to open his mouth, save to snarl at and curse his captor.

Five minutes later, however, Peter Cliquot was hustled out of the side door of the hotel in charge of a policeman, and taken in a closed carriage to the station house. Nick made sure that it was quietly done, without the knowledge of others, lest Gaston Dupont should learn of the arrest.

"Well, Bob, this turn of affairs forces me to become aggressive," Nick said gravely, when they were left alone in the valet's chamber. "The jewels must be recovered and these rascals driven to the wall before the arrest of Cliquot is learned, or it may alarm them into seeking safety in flight."

"That's right, too," Bob Ferret assented. "Have you got any idea where the jewels are, chief?"

"Not the slightest," said Nick.

"Gee! It looks like a close call for the sparks. Dupont will soon get wise to something wrong, chief, unless his valet shows up."

"That's the trouble." Nick nodded thoughtfully. "Can't you think of some way to fool him?"

"It has come to a play, Bob, where we must do more than fool him. Dupont is still out in his auto, in all probability. There's no telling just when he will return. You go down to the office and instruct the clerk to watch for him. When Dupont comes in, have the clerk tell him that his valet has just gone out with a lady friend, leaving word for Dupont that he will return in the evening."

"Bully for you, chief! That may stave off trouble for a spell."

"Make sure that the clerk intercepts him and tells him that Cliquot has been gone only a few minutes. That will appear to reduce the time he has been absent."

"Sure thing."

"Having done this," Nick added; "you hang round the elevator and, when Dupont comes in, confirm the clerk's statements by telling the same story—that the valet asked you to mention that he was going out for a time. To make it still stronger, you may say you saw him on the side stairway, talking with a young lady just before he left."

"I'm wise," Bob quickly nodded. "Trust me to fill the bill, chief; but what's your game?"

"I'm going to remain in Dupont's rooms."

"Holy smoke!"

"You must pay no attention to me, however," cautioned Nick. "You play the part you've been playing, mind you, and if I leave here, or need you for any reason, I'll contrive to let you know."

"I understand."

"Be off, then, and instruct the clerk," said Nick. "Make sure there's no slip-up."

"You bet!"

CHAPTER VIII.

DUPONT'S MAGIC OIL.

While Nick Carter was engaged as described, one of his chief lieutenants, Patsy, was by no means idle. As Nick had inferred, there was a very good reason why Patsy had not reported, though far from as serious as he had apprehended.

The experiences of Patsy were, in fact, not only extraordinarily strange, but also confirmed the importance which Nick attached to the bottle of oil he had seen Devereau, the hairdresser, so cautiously secure in Mrs. Whitney's apartments.

Assigned the task of obtaining all, or a part, of the contents of this bottle, yet so stealthily that the theft should not be suspected and Nick's own designs perverted, Patsy mingled with the people who gathered in the hotel corridor after the robbery became generally known, and waited until nearly twelve o'clock for Devereau to depart.

Seeing him leave the suite and approach the elevator, Patsy darted down the three flights of stairs and prepared to pick him up on the street. Slipping into a doorway that Devereau must pass if he returned to his place of business that night, the location of which Patsy had learned, the detective had waited only a few minutes when he saw him approaching. He did not notice a man coming from the opposite direction, however, though fortune favored him in that they met scarce ten feet from his concealment, where both abruptly halted within easy hearing.

"Perdition!" Devereau exclaimed, as if startled. "You out here, Cliquot? Why do you stop me?"

"Cliquot!" thought Patsy. "By Jove, that's the name of Dupont's valet."

"You know," was Cliquot's response, significantly made.

"I know, hang you, that you are taking a needless risk."

"The risk be hanged, not me," was the reply. "Have you got that stuff?"

"Yes, I've got it."

"Let's have it. Give it to me."

"What's that for?"

"It's Dupont's orders. You know that without my telling you."

"I know, too, that I can lose nothing by keeping it," Devereau snarled aggressively. "I'll give it to him to-morrow."

"You'll give it to me to-night," Cliquot said, with ominous quietude.

"Will I? I'll see you hanged first."

"What's that? Do you dare——"

"I dare protect my interests in this affair, make no mistake about that," Devereau interrupted, with suppressed ferocity that evinced the intense nervous strain under which he was laboring. "This is the only hold I have on him, in case he attempts to give me the worst of it. I'm going to have mine, mind you; all that's coming to me."

"You'll get all that's coming to you," snapped Cliquot. "Dupont always makes good as he agrees."

"I'm not so sure of it," Devereau snarled. "A man capable of this job is capable of cheating a confederate."

"He'd shove a knife into you, Devereau, if he heard you say that."

"That's just the point, and I'll make sure he doesn't do it, either literally or figuratively. I've got a grip on him as long as I hang onto this infernal stuff with which he provided me for this job, and I'll not let go of it."

"You——"

"Oh, there's no more to it, whether he likes it or not," Devereau fiercely insisted. "Let him call at my shop in the morning, if he has any kick coming. I've only time to go there and hit the last train home."

"But——"

"There ain't any buts. I'll talk no more about it. Go to the devil!"

And Devereau, jerking his coat around him, forced his way by the other and hurried up the street.

"Gee! he's upset, all right," thought Patsy, who had overheard all. "The rascally job has shaken every nerve in his body. The chief must be on the right track for fair, and it's up to me to nail that bottle. Going to his shop, eh? Mebbe he's going to leave the stuff there. By ginger! the chance is worth taking. By sprinting I can reach the hair joint five minutes ahead of him. That ought to be time enough for quick hands and a sure picklock."

Peering out, Patsy found that Cliquot had disappeared.

Devereau was turning the nearest corner.

Leaving his concealment, Patsy bounded after him, passing him on the opposite side of Fifth Avenue half a minute later, and covering the six blocks to Devereau's business quarters at a rate of speed surprising himself even.

The shop of the hairdresser was on the second floor front of a large office building, the door of which had not been closed.

Darting up the stairs and into the deserted corridor, Patsy whipped out a picklock and in less than thirty seconds he opened the door bearing Devereau's sign.

He expected to find the place in darkness, but a small gaslight was burning, shedding a feeble light through the single large room.

Patsy sized up the place at a glance, looking quite vainly for a place of concealment. The floor was carpeted. One wall was flanked with shelves containing numerous bottles, pomade pots, boxes of cosmetic, and numerous other toilet articles pertaining to the hairdresser's business.

On the opposite wall was a broad mirror, in front of which stood a large swivel chair, for the use of customers on whom Devereau was at work. A small desk occupied one corner of the room. Near it was a low couch, too low for a person to lie underneath it, while the several other chairs were of a style that offered no safe concealment.

Against the rear wall, however, was a large cabinet with glass doors. It contained about a dozen busts, or lay figures, made of wax, each occupying a pedestal about two feet high. On the head of each figure was displayed a wig, the making of which was a part of Devereau's business.

Knowing that unless he could watch Devereau he might not be able to locate the bottle specially wanted, in case it was placed among others of like size and shape, Patsy saw at a glance that this large cabinet was his only hope.

The figure in one corner of it was that of a young man with a curly black wig, a flowing mustache, and very red cheeks.

Patsy tried the cabinet door nearest the figure and found that he could open it.

"Gee! they look like a row of targets," he muttered. "It's a rum go for fair, but it's an only chance."

Quickly removing the wig from the figure mentioned, Patsy adjusted it on his own head. He found, also, that the flowing mustache was an ordinary false one. He ripped it off, warmed it over the flickering light, then plastered it on his own upper lip.

Turning to a shelf just under the mirror, he found a box of rouge, and in a moment had given his cheeks a glorious ruddy hue.

"Holy smoke! That's the quickest change on record," he chuckled, glancing into the mirror. "I look enough like that wax bloke to be his twin brother. He must take a back seat, though, for fair."

Quickly entering the cabinet, Patsy closed the glass door. Seating himself on the floor, he placed the bust behind him, crossed his legs around the bottom of the pedestal, grasping the base of it with both hands, and leaned forward in such a position that he fairly appeared to be resting on it.

"Now, old chap, come in with your bottle," he said to himself dryly. "If you fail to recognize me as an old standby, there'll be rough-house starting here right off the reel. Ah, by Jove, he's coming!"

Patsy had had but little time to spare, and now sat as rigid as a rock.

The door had been opened and Devereau entered, closing it behind him. His first move after turning up the gas was to consult his watch; and his dark face, looking haggard after the doings of that night, changed like a flash.

Patsy read its expression correctly.

"Gee! he's too late for his train," he thought. "Great guns! I hope he won't take it into his head to stay here the rest of the night."

Devereau had removed his hat and overcoat and hung them on a rack near the door.

He did not so much as glance toward the cabinet. Familiarity breeds contempt.

He took from his pocket the bottle of oil, and, after surveying it with a mingled scowl and leer, he stood it back of some other bottles on one of the shelves.

Patsy stared, with increasing misgivings.

Devereau began to pace the floor, evidently nervous and disturbed. At times he wrung his hands, as if filled with dread, or the stings of remorse. An hour passed, but he still remained, showing no signs of departing nor a sign of sleeping.

"Thundering guns! I'm in for it, no mistake," thought Patsy, upon hearing a clock strike two. "It's an all-night racket sure."

So it proved to be; yet Devereau, though he tossed on the couch at times, did not turn out the gas nor close his eyes.

Patsy had no alternative but to keep quiet and await developments.

Morning came, when he felt sure he must be discovered.

Accustomed to constantly seeing the figures in the cabinet, however, Devereau paid no attention to them. A cursory glance at Patsy would, in all probability, not have revealed the subterfuge.

The tread of a janitor sounded in the corridor.

Devereau hurried to the door and ordered him to bring up a cup of coffee from a restaurant below, also a morning paper.

Ten minutes later he drank the coffee and sat down near the front window to read about—his crime.

Patsy endured his tortures with the fortitude of a stoic.

"Gee! if he doesn't dust out for his noon lunch I can see where I go to pieces," he bitterly soliloquized. "Nick'll think me up against rough-house for fair, if he doesn't hear from me pretty soon."

Devereau appeared relieved after reading the paper.

He arose and consulted an appointment book on his desk, then glanced at his watch and began to arrange some toilet articles on the shelf under the mirror.

"Great Scott!" thought Patsy, with augmented dismay. "He's getting ready for a customer."

Patsy was right—but the customer was late in keeping his appointment.

It was nearly noon when he came in—an elderly man with profuse gray hair that curled in waves and ringlets around his ears. He was exceedingly well dressed, and appeared like an antiquated dandy. A diamond of remarkable brilliancy gleamed in his cravat.

Devereau received him politely, bowing, and scraping, and rubbing his hands.

"Good morning, Mr. Kirk; good morning," he repeated. "You are a little late, sir, but there is ample time before dinner. Dressed as usual, I suppose?"

"Yes, Devereau, of course," Mr. Kirk responded, taking the chair before the mirror.

Devereau quickly covered him with an apron and went to work.

Patsy sat and stared—and envied the insensibilities of his glass-eyed companions in the cabinet.

He found relief a little late, however, in an increasing interest in the hairdresser. Devereau, as he neared the end of his work, appeared a bit nervous, and glanced frequently toward the shelf on which he had placed the bottle causing Patsy so much trouble, and seemed to be weighing some project in mind.

"By gracious! he's got his eye on that bottle," thought Patsy. "There's jugglery of some sort in it, or he wouldn't have such a look on his swarthy mug."

The last had not crossed his mind before Devereau, having trimmed the man's hair, turned and took the bottle from the shelf. He made no comments, as if the proceeding was nothing unusual; but he began to anoint his customer's hair and rub the oil into the scalp with the balls of his fingers.

Kirk sat looking into the mirror.

Patsy watched him, but could detect no change in his looks.

Devereau, on the other hand, was white with suppressed excitement. Presently he glanced at his man, and said quietly:

"Mr. Kirk."

Mr. Kirk still gazed, but did not answer. His eyes had taken on a glassy brilliancy.

"Mr. Kirk! Mr. Kirk!" Devereau repeated, louder.

Still no reply; no further change in the man in the chair.

Devereau now moved like a flash.

He dried his oily hands, turned down the apron from Kirk's neck, and quickly removed the diamond from his cravat and slipped it into his pocket. This having been done, he replaced the apron and resumed his work.

At the end of about two minutes he glanced again at the man's eyes and said complacently:

"Will you call as usual a week from to-day, Mr. Kirk?"

"Yes, Devereau, weather permitting," was Kirk's reply.

Obviously, he was entirely oblivious to his recent brief period of unconsciousness.

"Oh, by the great hornspoon!" Patsy mentally exclaimed, so amazed that he quite forgot his aching bones. "That oil contains some kind of a drug, some infernal stuff that produces unconsciousness for a short time, without the subject's realizing it. By thunder! that's why Mrs. Whitney did not see her jewels stolen from the secret drawer. Devereau had been using this oil on her head. That's how the trick was turned. Gee! but Nick must have smelled the rat in the meal, as sure as I'm a foot high—and I ain't but little higher just now!"

Patsy was right—Nick had suspected it.

Gaston Dupont had made a mistake when, in sketching his ideal of a master crook, he emphasized the study he would make of drugs and their peculiar qualities, particularly those not generally known.

Mr. Kirk arose from the chair a little later, much improved by Devereau's tonsorial work—though not by his sleight of hand. He turned from the chair, then suddenly stopped short and recoiled, as if struck in the face.

His gaze had lighted upon Patsy.

Patsy gazed back at him with a stony stare—but his blood was leaping.

"Good God!" Kirk cried. "What have you got here, Devereau? That looks like——"

He never made the comparison.

Devereau had turned and, instantly guessing the truth, uttered a cry that shook the walls. He did not wait for his coat and hat, but, bent only upon escape, rushed like a madman toward the corridor door.

Patsy leaped to his feet, pulled a gun, and dashed open the cabinet doors.

"Hold on!" he yelled, amid the crash of breaking glass. "Stop, you rascal, or I'll shoot!"

"Shoot be hanged!" shrieked Devereau desperately.

He swerved, as if to dodge a bullet, nevertheless, and tore open the door leading into the corridor—only to rush squarely into the arms of Chick Carter, who at that moment was entering the place in search of Patsy.

"Wow!" Patsy greeted him, with a yell of a Comanche. "Hang onto him, Chick! Hang on, old man! He's the meat we're after!"

Chick Carter hung on, and with but very little trouble; for Devereau, forced back into the room, wilted like a rag and fell in a heap on the floor.

CHAPTER IX.

A SHARP PURSUIT.

Left alone in Dupont's chamber, Nick Carter very quickly sized up the possibilities of the situation. Though his original design was to have searched Dupont's trunks, in the hope of finding evidence that would serve his purpose, he now realized that Dupont might return at any moment, and that the absence of his valet might lead to something of even greater significance than anything to be found in his apartments.

It then was nearly noon, and, having put things in the same order as he had found them and locked the doors of both closets, Nick looked for a place of concealment, resolved to await Dupont's arrival. The bed, which stood against one of the walls, offered the only reasonably safe concealment.

Nick crept under it and stretched himself close to the baseboard of the wall in a position enabling him to see most of the lower part of the room. Placing a revolver on the floor within easy reach, he settled himself to await the coming of the rascal.

He had waited about an hour when Dupont came in, and he did not come alone. He was followed by Kennedy, his chauffeur, both evidently somewhat disturbed.

"What business had he to go out?" Kennedy was

growling, as he strode into the parlor. "One of you ought to be here all of the time. If the house gets wise to that closet job, Gassy, it will be up to us to jump."

"That job won't be discovered, Pat," Dupont curtly answered. "We always lock both closet doors when we go out. Peter hasn't been gone more than five minutes, the clerk told me, and things are all right here. He's got a girl on the string, the more fool for it, and I imagine he's taken an afternoon out with her. He knew I should return about this time, so there's no harm done."

"No harm, mebbe; but you know who we're up against," Kennedy grumbled. "You may fool Nick Carter some of the time, but not all the time, you can bet on that. He's a bad egg!"

"When we can't fool him, Pat, we'll do the other thing."

"Other thing?"

"Yes. Get him, as we got the dewdrops," said Dupont, with vicious asperity. "Not only get him, Pat, but down him. Put him where he can do us no harm."

"That's easier said than done."

"Bah! Take my word for it, you grumbler, when I cannot fool Nick Carter I'll floor him."

"I'm very well floored already," Nick dryly murmured, gazing from under the bed.

What little he had heard convinced him that he had built on a good foundation. Obviously Bob Ferret and the clerk had done their work well. Peering out cautiously, Nick could see the two rascals in the adjoining room. Dupont had laid aside his hat and fur coat. Nick saw him glance into the bedroom, when he remarked that everything was all right.

Pat Kennedy had kept on his heavy garments, however, and was restlessly pacing the room, with an ugly scowl on his thin, sinister face.

"Why did you want me to come up here?" he asked, evidently not entirely assured by Dupont's confidence in himself.

"Can't you guess?"

"Guessing ain't in my line. I'll know for sure, if you tell me."

"I want about two dozen of those sparks."

"You do, eh? What for?"

"I need some ready money," Dupont said coldly. "I can get it, after I get them."

"You'll get it in the neck, Gassy, if you try shoving them out as soon as this," Kennedy growled, in disapproval.

"Don't you fear. The fence that I do business with will never squeal."

"Mebbe not, but——"

"I can't stand for any buts, Pat," Dupont curtly interrupted. "I've got to have the stuff, or we'll be looking for cheaper lodgings. I'll have to come down and bunk in your infernal neighborhood. You do what I tell you. I will realize on the dewdrops today, and see that you get yours."

"I don't half fancy it. You're taking a chance."

"I know what I'm about," Dupont cried sharply. "Don't attempt to dictate to me. I've made no slip-up yet, and I'll not begin at this stage of the game."

"All, right," Kennedy growled. "It's more your funeral than mine. Where will you have them?"

"Bring them round to Riley's at three o'clock. Loose, mind you. Doctor Asbury will join you there and take them."

"That all?"

"Yes."

"I'll be there."

Kennedy vouchsafed the last with a shrug, then turned and strode out of the room.

"I'll be there, too, unless I'm much mistaken," Nick grimly said to himself. "They have the jewels, all right, and Kennedy has charge of them. It's odds that he was the rascal in that room on the sixth floor. His now is the trail that will lead to the plunder."

Left alone in his parlor, Dupont did not hasten his departure. He rang for a servant and had a lunch brought to his room. He ate it moderately, then smoked a cigar, seated with his heels on the sill of the window and his gaze turned on the street below.

Nick Carter waited patiently, more than content with the turn of affairs.

At half-past two Dupont arose, and Nick saw him entering the bedroom.

He removed his fashionable suit, then put on one of seedy black, with a frock coat. Unlocking one of his trunks, he took out an overcoat that corresponded with the suit.

Going deeper, he removed a false bottom from the trunk. From the space below it he took a reddish wig and beard, which he carefully adjusted at his mirror, and then touched up his face and brows with sticks of grease paint. When all was done, he presented the appearance of a very respectable elderly man of the professional order.

Before departing he relocked his trunk and put away the suit he had removed. Then, slipping a revolver into his hip pocket, he made his way through the opening in the closet, locking both doors after him.

Nick Carter waited until he heard both of them closed, then scrambled quietly from under the bed and passed through Dupont's suite, quickly reaching the main corridor. Bob Ferret was standing at the farther end of it.

Signing for him to hasten down to the street and follow at a distance, Nick darted into the side corridor, where he located Dupont descending the second flight of stairs. Now, sure of his man, Nick followed him less hurriedly.

Without any trouble, he shadowed Dupont to a Third Avenue saloon, where the rascal joined a man standing at the bar. Though in disguise, the figure was plainly that of Kennedy. The two men had a drink together, and Nick, watching from outside, saw Kennedy slip Dupont a small parcel.

They departed separately, Dupont in advance, and Nick let him go and took up the trail of the other.

Kennedy headed straight for the East Side, and finally approached a run-down tenement block in one of the side streets. Without using a key, he entered one of the dwellings and closed the door.

Nick darted across the street and mounted the steps, where he waited for a few seconds, then cautiously entered.

Glancing up a flight of bare stairs, he discovered—Kennedy, peering over the baluster rail on the second floor.

The rascal, fearing he might possibly be in danger, had waited to see.

One downward look seemed to convince him of the truth. Like a flash he came out of his overcoat, leaving it lying on the floor, and bolted for the third story.

"Bound for the roof, as sure as death and taxes!" thought Nick, at once suspecting the avenue of escape to which the rascal was resorting.

Also dropping his overcoat, Nick flew up the stairs after him.

Kennedy had reached the third floor and was out of sight, but the detective still could hear his heavy tread. He also heard the closing of a door, followed by the turning of a key, as he mounted the second flight.

He knew it was not that of a front room, also that Kennedy would not seek safety in a room from which there was no second egress. Nick saw, too, that there was still another flight of stairs, and the design of the rascal dawned upon him.

"There's a fire escape," he said to himself. "He'll try to go down, or, if up, will enter an upper room and attempt to double on me and reach the street."

Nick's conjecture, flashing through his mind as he reached the third hall, was correct. At the same moment he heard a window opened in a rear room.

Rushing through the hall, Nick threw himself full force against the closed door. Both lock and hinges gave way under the terrific blow, and the door crashed to the floor of the room.

Nick bounded over it—caught sight of Kennedy's legs on a ladder outside of the window, and the swinging section of a small platform which the ruffian had broken from the wall to prevent Nick from following him.

The detective went through the window like a cyclone, however, or nearly through it, sending the panes and sashes to the ground below.

A quick reach enabled him to seize Kennedy's legs, and Nick jerked him down the ladder he was climbing, at the same time crying sternly:

"It's all off, you rascal! Quit right here, or you'll fall."

"Fall be hanged!" Kennedy snarled back at him, with eyes blazing.

At the same time he let go of the ladder with one hand and pulled a revolver from his hip pocket.

Nick let go of the rascal's legs and reached for his arm and shoulders, beating up the former just as the shot was fired.

The bullet flew over Nick's head and crashed against the wall.

"None of that, Kennedy!" he thundered. "I want you, and I'm going to have you!"

He tore the ruffian from the ladder while he spoke, holding him by one arm only, and Kennedy crashed down against the wall below the window, forty feet from the ground.

He dropped his revolver. A yell of terror broke from him, fairly drowned by the detective's threatening commands.

"The truth—out with it!" Nick thundered. "Where are the jewels? If you haven't told me in one second I'll drop you!"

"Don't—for God's sake!" Kennedy shrieked wildly. "I'll confess! Don't drop me!"

"Where are they?" roared Nick, loosing his grip a trifle.

"Don't—don't let go! They're in my room, under the floor!"

Nick jerked him into the window, and in ten seconds had the knave in irons.

CHAPTER X.

AT THE FINISH.

"Come in!"

Gaston Dupont gazed over his evening paper at the man who, in response to the call following his knock, sauntered into the parlor of his suite and removed his hat.

The visitor was Nick Carter.

Dupont went ghastly white for an instant, but sprang up quickly, with every nerve under rigid control. He knew that his valet still was absent—but he knew of nothing more to have given him uneasiness.

"Good heavens, my dear Carter!" he cried, extending his hand. "Is it you, indeed?"

"Yes." Nick laughed and shook hands with him. "Not expecting me so soon, eh? Well, you invited me to call, Dupont, when I had fully decided to take on this Whitney case again."

"To be sure! So I did!" Dupont exclaimed, with eyes lighting. "So glad to see you, too. Have you really decided?"

"If not, I shouldn't be here," smiled Nick.

"Good enough! I'm delighted."

"Yes, I thought you'd be," Nick said dryly.

"I am, indeed."

"You said, you may remember, that you might be able to help me with further suggestions."

"True, true; so I did!" cried Dupont, laughing quite gleefully.

"So I've called to talk it over with you."

"The robbery?"

"Certainly."

"Delighted—delighted, my dear Carter."

"Your picture of a master crook was so suggestive," laughed Nick, with a subtle gleam in his eyes, "that I since have judged that you might assist even a master detective."

"That's yourself, my dear Carter, always. I hope I may be able to aid you further, I really do. Take a chair, Carter; take the armchair."

"No, not here, thank you," said Nick, more earnestly. "I met Whitney in the office when I came in, and he suggested our coming to his suite. His wife is absent for the evening, and—but, by the way, Dupont, do not mention your suspicions concerning her, not while in his presence. I begin to think you may be right, and will discuss that with you a little later. You have no objection to going?"

"Not the slightest," Dupont heartily declared, rubbing his hands. "We'll go at once, my dear Carter, at once. Wait only until I slip on my Tuxedo."

"Certainly," bowed Nick. "There's no special haste."

Nevertheless, only ten minutes had passed when Dupont, as hoodwinked a man as ever stood in leather,

followed Nick Carter into Mr. Arthur Whitney's suite, where both joined the latter in his parlor.

Gaston Dupont betrayed no sentimental compunctions over reappearing upon the scene of his crime. He appeared quite elated, in fact, over the early success of his morning call on the famous detective.

"Ah, my dear Whitney," he cried, extending his hand, "I told you I thought we could recall Detective Carter into this case. It was a mistake that we ever allowed him to drop it."

"I think so, too, Dupont."

"Has he told you that I called on him this morning, hoping to persuade him to resume his investigations?"

"Yes, Dupont, he has," Whitney replied, bowing. "That was very, very good of you."

"Don't mention it, not a word," chuckled Dupont, waving his slender hands. "I'm only too glad to be of help to you. We'll sit down and discuss the affair. We'll——"

"I hardly think that will be necessary, Dupont," Nick Carter quietly interrupted, from beside a table near by, on which an overcoat was lying.

Dupont turned quickly, with a sudden gleam leaping up in his eyes.

"Not necessary?" he cried suspiciously.

"Not at all, Dupont," smiled the detective.

"What do you mean? What do you imply by that?"

"Only that a master detective is, despite your recent assertions, always superior to a master crook," Nick blandly answered, still smiling. "The recovery of Mrs. Whitney's jewels would make such a discussion unnecessary, and we already have them. See for yourself, Dupont."

And Nick threw aside the overcoat, revealing beneath it a red-leather jewel case, from within which gleamed the stolen jewels, flashing with a thousand scintillating rays.

Gaston Dupont stared for an instant; then, with a half-choked oath, with a single backward leap, he bounded into the hall—and into the arms of two men who had stealthily entered, Chick Carter and Patsy.

There was a brief struggle, for Dupont fought like a demon, and not until he felt the manacles on his wrists did he cease his resistance. Then he turned to Nick Carter, ghastly as death itself, and with his fashionable raiment in disorder, and said with a bitter sneer:

"You're all right, Carter. You've won out. Do me the favor to take me to my suite, however, that I may brush up a bit before going to the station house. The sooner we leave the better I'll like it."

Nick did not keep him waiting long. Half an hour later the scamp was lodged in the Tombs, where the facts were disclosed to him, and enough learned from him to confirm all of the deductions that had led to Nick's very successful work.

As he had inferred, Mrs. Whitney's maid had discovered the hiding place of the jewels, a fact that Dupont had learned, and then bribed the girl into taking part in the robbery; as he had also done in the case of Devereau, providing him with the oil the hairdresser had used.

Though she could remember no time when she lost consciousness while Devereau was dressing her hair, nor was aware of any unusual sensations, Nick knew from Patsy's observations that his theory of the crime was entirely correct.

Dupont positively refused to disclose what drugs had been used in his preparation of the oil, however, and went to meet his punishment with an air of utter indifference and supercilious contempt.

This mattered very little to Nick Carter, however, most of the jewels having been recovered, and the several parties to the crime brought to their just deserts.

THE END.

You have no doubt now that Nick Carter has met a rogue who can engage him in a duel of wits quite worth the detective's while. In the next story we think you will be wholly convinced of this should you have a lingering doubt. The title is "The Man Who Vanished; or, Nick Carter's Craftiest Foe." The fox may double a few times, but the hound finally runs him down. Has this proved true of Nick Carter and Gaston Dupont; if so, will it continue to hold good? Those are interesting questions on which No. 699 —out next week—will throw some light.

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

NEW YORK, May 14, 1910.

TERMS TO NICK CARTER WEEKLY MAIL SUBSCRIBERS.

(*Postage Free.*)

Single Copies or Back Numbers, 5c. Each.

3 months	65c.	One year	$2.50
4 months	85c.	2 copies one year	4.00
6 months	$1.25	1 copy two years	4.00

How to Send Money—By post-office or express money order, registered letter, bank check or draft, at our risk. At your own risk if sent by currency, coin, or postage stamps in ordinary letter.

Receipts—Receipt of your remittance is acknowledged by proper change of number on your label. If not correct you have not been properly credited, and should let us know at once.

ORMOND G. SMITH, GEORGE C. SMITH, *Proprietors.*

STREET & SMITH, Publishers,
79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

FLASHING THE SIGNALS.

IT was the year 1895, during the Chitral Expedition under the command of Colonel Clayton. Our force was composed of several British, Sikh, and Ghoorka regiments. My friend, Jack Bilston, and myself were signaling sergeants in our company. Jack was a typical Staffordshireman, a gruff-voiced, burly fellow, who looked as though his ancestors had thrown tons upon tons of red-hot iron into furnaces and inherited something of its nature; for he was as tough as iron and as true as steel, with no small amount of common sense.

To paddle his own canoe was Jack's motto, but he more frequently paddled other people's; no one asked twice for a favor from Jack, who was the soul of good nature. His friendship for me has somewhat smoothed my rather checkered career, for never had soldier a truer or stancher comrade—strong as a lion, gentle as a lamb, and as rough as a bear withal.

One little anecdote may not be out of place to show what sort of a man Jack was. When he joined our company as a raw recruit, he was, on account of his enormous build, made a butt of by all. His good nature allowed it till the bully of the regiment one day grossly insulted him in the canteen. Jack did not strike him. No. He quietly strolled up to the bully, and said: "I can't strike yo' because I should spoil yo', but don't say that again. Have a drink, shake hands, and let's be pals." The bully stared, and then said: "Yes. I don't mind a drink with you, and I don't mind shaking hands; but I've yet to meet the man who can spoil me." They shook hands, and the bully howled in agony, for the blood spurted out of his finger ends. When Jack released his hand he said: "I wouldn't have hurt yo' if yo' hadn't bragged. Have another drink. We shall be friends now." And they were.

This will give you some idea of the hero who saved my life and also that of Lieutenant Dash. Jack's nickname was "Jack the Giant." He only stood five feet ten, but he was of enormous build and weighed 190 pounds—all bone and muscle. As a horseman and swordsman he had no equal, and he was no mean shot.

The story I am about to record surrounds the adventure of Lieutenant Dash and "Jack the Giant." Not a syllable did Jack whisper of the story, but it was common property an hour after the lieutenant had returned to camp. No soldier's deed of pluck was ever so advertised, for Lieutenant Dash had a heart as soft as a lady's.

After a long day's march from Khar to Mundiakhar our company pitched their tents for the night on a mountainside some fifty miles march from Chitral. We had been sniped at during the day by strolling bands of Swatis, but had had no chance to return the compliment. All looked serene, but our colonel was one of the old school and always prepared for a storm when there was a calm. So it came about that Lieutenant Dash and "Jack the Giant" were ordered out with the heliograph and flags to reconnoitre from the top of a hill some three miles away.

They were to signal to the picket if they saw any sign of the enemy in the vicinity. I wished Jack luck, and that was the last I saw of him till the following morning. The story the lieutenant told was as follows. As nearly as possible I will give it in his own words:

"When we reached the hill, I got my glasses to work, but could discover no sign or trace of the enemy. I then handed them to Sergeant Bilston, who had no sooner put them to his eyes than he said: 'They are over there, sir. I can see the smoke in the air. They must be six miles away, at least.'

"I took the glasses, and saw that what had escaped my eyes had attracted his. There was indeed smoke, rising evidently from camp fires. I ordered the sergeant to heliograph the news, for the sun was still shining. He was about to do so when I heard him shout: 'Defend yourself, lieutenant; they're upon us.'

"I turned and saw Sergeant Bilston knock one fellow down with the butt end of his gun, which he threw at another, who went headlong down the hill. Then he picked up a third by the legs and used him as a club against the others. The 'club' had got one home, however, for he had stabbed the sergeant in the left leg. I fired my revolver into the midst of them, but was struck down from behind; and the last I remember was seeing Sergeant Bilston, his legs astride my body, swinging his human club. I tried to rise, but failed, and fell back unconscious. When I came to I found myself bound hand and foot in front of a camp fire.

"It appeared that the sergeant had continued the fight and roughly handled some six of them before he was overpowered. A deserter from the Indian Army who had joined the Swatis and who spoke broken English told me this, as he gloated over the fact that we should be tortured to death when their chief arrived. I asked where the sergeant was. A bundle of humanity similarly bound to myself and lying some six yards away was pointed out to me. My friend the enemy was full of pretty sayings to the effect that we might perhaps be roasted, or tied to a horse's tail, or buried in the snow up to our heads. Such little stories as these he invented for my amusement. At last the talk round the fires, which had been loud and angry, somewhat decreased, and even my informant grew tired of dilating on what was to come to an unappreciative listener. I asked him to pardon my rudeness in not seeming more interested, but his friends had somewhat upset my brainpan, for my head was spinning like a top.

"With some pain and exertion I looked over to see how Sergeant Bilston was enjoying the sport. I saw a Swati, showing evidence of the sergeant's attentions, go up to him and deliberately kick him several times. But no sound escaped the sergeant. It was probably the human club getting a little of his own back. Soon, however, the Swati ventured too near the sergeant, who shot out his head like a python and grabbed his tormentor by the leg with his teeth. The native yelled with rage, and dragged the sergeant through the camp fire, as the burns on his face bear witness. I have heard of the tenacity of a Staffordshire bulldog, but no bulldog ever held on with such vigor and pluck as did Sergeant Bilston. It took three of them to make him leave go, and then they had to half strangle him.

He would certainly have paid the piper had not the chief in command arrived at that moment.

"The chief was a man of fine physique, and with the flat of his sword and two or three good kicks he sent the sergeant's assailants sprawling. He then angrily addressed them, with the result that Sergeant Bilston and I were placed in front of him. Through the medium of the deserter, who acted as interpreter, we were asked how large our force was, what cannon we had, how many horses, and had we the audacity to think that we were going to conquer the unconquerable, to all of which we refused an answer.

"Pointing to our captured heliograph and flags, the chief gave an order to the deserter, who picked up the instrument and flags and went toward the hill on which we had been disturbed. Sergeant Bilston turned to me and said: 'Lieutenant, he is going to signal the camp that all is well. They intend to attack our comrades to-night.'

"I saw in a moment the danger our force was in, for hundreds of the Swatis had followed their chief, and they evidently intended to attack late at night or early in the morning. When the chief heard the sergeant speak, he ordered us to be instantly gagged, and a sentinel placed over each of us. We were seemingly in a hopeless condition. The agony of thought that took possession of me was pitiful. To think that our comrades were to be deceived by a false signal, supposed to come from us, and then butchered while peacefully sleeping! It was terrible in the extreme. I saw a singular expression pass over Sergeant Bilston's face as he was being gagged, one that spoke volumes, and somehow it gave me heart, it was so full of hate, power, and determination. I knew that he meant to save his comrades or die with them—it needed no words to tell me that —and I resolved to do likewise. But how? Our case seemed hopeless; we were helpless.

"With his usual coolness the deserter told me, on his return, what we had already guessed; but the morning and not the night was the time decided upon to attack. He also informed me that he had been a signaler in his company, and had flashed to our camp the message, 'All's well. Returning.' Truly sufficient to still all alarm.

"One by one our captors fell asleep, and the sentinels sat down a few feet from us. Time dragged heavily and my cords cut horribly, but the pain in my limbs seemed to lessen the pain in my head. I tried to devise some means of escape, but I could think of nothing but an Irish dance, which ran tauntingly, like a demon, through my brain. I happened to look over to the sergeant, and he started winking furiously at me and nodding his head. I looked astounded, and felt intensely annoyed to think that while our comrades were about to be butchered by these friends, here was Sergeant Bilston absolutely winking! I turned my head away in disguist. Such levity at such a time from one I had hitherto known as the soul of honor and *camaraderie?* My repulsion of feeling seemed to steady the Irish jig, and I began to think that he must be mad. 'Yes, that must be it,' I thought. 'The poor fellow's brain is turned at the horrible thought of his comrades' fate.' It gave me pleasure to think that I had judged him wrongly, and I turned to look at him again, this time with deep sympathy.

"Again the sergeant started nodding his head and winking furiously, first one eye and then the other. Suddenly what he meant dawned on me in a flash, and I read in the Morse signal code: '-.-./---/-.-./-.-./---/.!!!! (Courage.)'

"By the aid of his eyes and head, the sergeant was flashing signals to me in the Morse alphabet. (Soldiers would do well to remember this situation and profit accordingly.) I instantly replied, '.-/-./-.-./!!!.../---/-.-./.!!!! (Any hope?)'

"The sergeant answered, '.!.../.!./-./-.-./!!! (Every.)'

"Then ensued the following conversation:

"'.-/-./-.../-./.!!!/-.-/-./-./-./!!! ./-./-./-/-./!!! (Knife yard away.)'

"'.!./-.!!!/-./.!/-/-./.../!!! (In reach?)'

"'-.-/.!.../!!!/-./-./.!/-!!! (Yes. Wait.)'

"'.../.!/-./.!./-./.!./.../!!!/-./.!/-./.!/-.!!! (Sentinels tired.)'

"At this moment the two sentinels made signs to each other. Approaching us, they whispered together. The sergeant signaled quickly to me: '.../-./-./.!./.-./!!! (Sleep.)'

"I guessed his meaning in an instant, and feigned sleep. One of the sentinels came up to me and turned me over. I snored. The other sentinel kicked the sergeant, who also snored. They both laughed and walked away. One of them pulled some marked stones out of a pouch at his side, with which, after sitting down, they started playing a game. I looked at the sergeant. His answer was, '-.-/---/-.-./-.-./!!! ---/.-./.!./-./.!!!-/./.!-/!!! (Roll over, meet me.)'

"So far, fortune had favored us by the glare of the fire, but now she began to desert us, for the fire burned so low that I could not see the sergeant's eyes. But I did as he had signaled, little dreaming his object. I rolled close to the sentinels, who were too absorbed in their game to notice me, but not an inch farther dared I go. They barred the way. Fortune again took pity upon us. The light was not sufficient for them to play by, and so they moved nearer the fire, but not near enough to allow room for me to roll by. I looked for the sergeant, and saw a figure rolling toward one of the sleeping Swatis. I thought it was the sergeant, but could not be sure, as the fire was now very low and we were in almost complete darkness.

"Once again fortune came to the rescue. Our sentinels got up and placed fresh logs on the fire. They soon began to crackle and burn, emitting as they did so the sweetest sound I have ever heard. The sentinels resumed their game nearer the fire, and left me, as I thought, a clear field. The fire burned brighter and brighter. I could again read the sergeant's eyes. He signaled: '-.-/-./-.-./-.-./.!!!-.-/-./-./-./!!!.../-./-./-./!!!! (Knife in hand.)'

"I replied: '.../---/-.-./!!!-.-/.!!! (How use?)'

"The sergeant answered: '-.../-./-.-./!!!-/---/!!!-.../-./-./-./!!! (Back to back.)'

"My next question was: '.-/!!!-.-/.-./-./!!!-.-/---/.-./-./.!.../!!! (You cut cords?)'

"The sergeant said: '-.-/-./.!.../!!! (Yes.)'

"I could see the knife in the sergeant's hands, but he was powerless to use it on his own bonds, as his hands, like mine, were tied behind him. I understood, however, that by his holding the knife and my rubbing my back against it, the cords that bound mine would be severed. How carefully did I roll the few remaining yards that separated us. Horror! A twig broke under me. The sentinels jumped up and clutched their swords. The one guarding the sergeant looked our way for some seconds. Appearing satisfied, they both laughed and continued their game. What a sigh of relief we raised! I rolled again. One more turn and we should be back to back. It was successfully accomplished.

"Then we commenced slowly to rub up and down, the sergeant with the knife, I with my back. I could feel the steel cutting my thongs, and presumably my hands as well, but I felt no pain. At last my hands were free. I took the knife, rolled over, and liberated the sergeant's hands. He then slid down and released my feet, and I in my turn commenced to cut the cords that bound his. In doing so I dislodged a stone, which went rolling down the hill, making what appeared to us a terrible noise.

"The sergeant said: 'Quick, or we are lost.'

"I cut like lightning at his thongs, but the knife flew out of my hand.

"'Fly for your life. Leave me. Warn the company,' came the sergeant's voice. But luck was on our side. I found the knife, and with one cut severed the remaining thongs.

"With their swords drawn, the two sentinels were charging us. The sergeant, stooping down, picked up a sleeping Swati and threw him on the swords, but not before the alarm was given. The whole camp was up like one man, and our way was barred by three Swatis, who were half asleep and looked at us like frightened sheep.

"Shouting 'Follow me,' the sergeant knocked one of them down with his fist. I felt over the second, and the third was on top of me in a moment, with his knife raised ready to strike when he received a punch under the ear that put him to sleep again. I felt myself lifted bodily and placed on my feet. Then the two of us started running like mad. The sergeant had again saved my life.

"We ran with the whole camp at our heels for quite two hundred yards. Bullets sang about our ears and sent the snow flying in front of us. I was a little ahead of the sergeant, but I rather think he followed to protect me, as I have seen him win a race at the sports in which I should have been left hopelessly behind. We ran for our lives. Some fifty yards ahead we espied a rudely constructed bridge spanning a gully, and for this bridge we made. By now three of our pursuers had mounted and were riding to cut us off. We would have barely time to reach the bridge, but no chance when across, for the mounted men would soon overtake us.

"'It's no use, sergeant,' I shouted; 'we are trapped.'

"He replied: 'Run. Think of our comrades. The shots will warn them and save the camp.'

"We reached and crossed the bridge perhaps forty seconds in advance of the Swatis on horseback. I ran on. Hearing shouts, I turned to look back. I saw the sergeant positively wrench the bridge bodily from its holdings and swing one end over the gulf. The foremost horseman did the rest, for before he could draw rein he and his horse broke the bridge away, and horse and rider were hurled sixty feet into the gulf beneath.

"I shouted in triumph, but it was short-lived, for a bullet struck me and I fell with my leg broken. I could hear cries of rage from the other side of the gully. Then I felt myself lifted as easily as if I had been a child, and a voice as sweet as a woman's said, in the Staffordshire dialect: 'Don't yo' worry, sir; your honor is safe. Our comrades are saved.' Then I swooned.

"When I regained consciousness I was in camp. They told me that our boys had improvised a new bridge, and that the Swatis had suffered a crushing defeat, for the sergeant, after handing me over to my friends, had led the way back and helped to gain the victory."

* * * * * * *

"Jack the Giant" is still the same true comrade, the pride of his fellow soldiers and my best friend. What do you ask? Did he receive any recognition? No, he gave all the credit to Lieutenant Dash, who is now a colonel; but "Jack the Giant" will never want a friend while Colonel Dash lives. Jack has since been offered a commission, but he refused it. He likes the sergeants' mess too well. And we can't part, with one of whom we are so proud.

ROMANCE OF THE AUCTION.

"Of course I have met with a good many interesting experiences during my career as an auctioneer," relates Henry Stevens in the *Strand*, "but the most striking of them all occurred, I think, in connection with a great auk's egg.

"Some years ago a young fellow rode over to an obscure furniture sale at the country village in the hope of securing a bargain to help in furnishing a home in view of his intended marriage. And a bargain he did get, though not of the kind he originally thought of.

"One of the lots put up for sale was a basket full of shells, eggs, and other oddments which had attracted the attention of an old lady who happened to be present. Just as they were on the point of being knocked down to her the young man was struck with the appearance of two large eggs in the basket, and thinking he might as well have them as curiosities, he started to bid, with the result that the lot was knocked down to him for nine dollars.

"Upon examining the eggs, it occurred to him that he might be able to make a slight profit on their sale. He accordingly wrapped them up in a handkerchief and brought them to me.

"As soon as I had washed off the grime which covered them I discovered that they were eggs of no less a bird than the great auk, and as the result of their sale, a few weeks later, I handed the astute young bargain hunter a check for two thousand dollars, which was sufficient to set him up in business.

"Another sale which I conducted there was an old picture so covered with dirt and grime that it was almost impossible to see what it was like. This was hung upon the wall in a prominent position, but did not apparently find favor in the eyes of any of the dealers who were present. No reserve price was placed upon this picture, which had been put into the sale by a local pawnbroker, to whom it had been pledged and not redeemed.

"In spite of every effort on the part of the auctioneer, it was eventually knocked down to a young man who had looked into the sale quite casually in order to waste half an hour during which he had to wait for a train. Taking a great fancy to the frame, which was of oak, blackened with age, he hazarded a bid of five dollars, at which price it was knocked down to him without any competition.

"As he did not want the picture, he asked the auctioneer whether he would mind trying to get a bid for it if he cut it out of the frame; and being answered in the affirmative, he took out his knife and neatly cut through the canvas all round the edge.

"Imagine the astonishment of himself and all present when, hidden behind the canvas, he discovered five bills for one hundred dollars each. Evidently the picture had been used to conceal the savings of some previous owner, who had died without disclosing the secret and whose hard-won fortune thus came into the hands of a total stranger.

"I should quote as very interesting a sale at Rutland Gate, where there were only the remains of the furniture, a firm having been allowed to take what they chose to their rooms. It was accordingly after the nature of a rummage sale, but in one cupboard, which had been overlooked, were what the junior clerk described as three silver cups. The auctioneer was sitting in his office when a gentleman drove up in a hansom cab, anxious to speak about these cups, for which he offered no less than fifteen hundred dollars.

"The auctioneer was so much surprised that he thought his visitor must have some reason for this high bid, and he wisely determined not to take the first offer he received. 'Oh, I don't think they will take that,' he said, and with this answer the gentleman had to be content. An expert was called on to examine the so-called cups, and he discovered them to be in reality sixteenth-century chalices, for which he himself made an offer of two thousand one hundred dollars. The three cups were subsequently sold for five thousand seven hundred and fifty dollars, but it was only by the slightest chance that they had not gone for a more song.

"I shall never forget an incident which occurred in connection with the sale of some valuable shells. The bidding for one large shell in particular was much more brisk than I had anticipated, but the reason for this became apparent when at last it was knocked down to a gentleman in a very excited condition, who directly it was handed to him, flung it upon the ground and trampled it to atoms, at the same time shouting out in a loud voice that now that one was destroyed he possessed the only specimen in the world."

THE CLUMSY NEPHEW.

The rich uncle was very ill indeed. The favorite nephew had come to pay him a visit. The rich uncle bade him pour himself out a glass of wine. "Well, my dear uncle," said the nephew, as he raised the glass, "here's a speedy end to all your sufferings."

LATEST ISSUES

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

The best detective stories on earth. Nick Carter's exploits are read the world over. High art colored covers. Thirty-two big pages. Price, 5 cents.

687—The Westervelt Option; or, Nick Carter on a Puzzling Trail.
688—The Vanishing Heiress; or, Nick Carter's Carnation Clue.
689—The Birth of a Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Case by Accident.
690—A Clue from the Past; or, Nick Carter's Relentless Foe.
691—The Red Triangle; or, Nick Carter's Three-Cornered Puzzle.
692—Doctor Quartz Again; or, Nick Carter's Shrewdest Opponent.
693—The Famous Case of Doctor Quartz; or, Nick Carter's Most Subtle Foe.
694—The Chemical Clue; or, Nick Carter in Pursuit of Doctor Quartz.
695—The Prison Cipher; or, Nick Carter Tracing a Mysterious Decoy.
696—A Pupil of Doctor Quartz; or, Nick Carter's Accidental Clue.
697—The Midnight Visitor; or, Nick Carter's Teasing Mystery.
698—The Master Crook's Match; or, Nick Carter on His Mettle.
699—The Man Who Vanished; or, Nick Carter's Craftiest Foe.

DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY

The heroes of the stories published in this weekly are dear to the hearts of 60,000 boys. Diamond Dick is a splendid Western character. High art colored covers. Thirty-two big pages. Price, 5 cents.

701—Diamond Dick's Keen Sight; or, The Mystery of the Settlement.
702—Diamond Dick's Forest Mystery; or, Through the Great North Woods.
703—Diamond Dick's Surprise Party; or, The Outlaws of Mountain Lake.
704—Diamond Dick's Sparkling Signal; or, The Trail of the Missing Necklace.
705—Diamond Dick's Game of Chance; or, Grappling with the Razorback Band.
706—Diamond Dick's Convict Chase; or, The Mysterious Jail Delivery.
707—Diamond Dick's Jewel Hunt; or, The Riddle of the Priceless Gem.
708—Diamond Dick's Noble Exploit; or, The Rogues Who Missed Their Mark.
709—Diamond Dick's Fire Mystery; or, Rounding Up a Rascally Band.
710—Diamond Dick's Adroitness; or, The Mystery of the Health Hotel.

BRAVE AND BOLD WEEKLY

All kinds of stories that boys like. The biggest and best nickel's worth ever offered. High art colored covers. Thirty-two big pages. Price, 5 cents.

376—The Young Guardsman; or, With Washington in the Ohio Valley. By John De Morgan.
377—Tom of the Lion Heart; or, The Adventures of a Fearless Boy. By Matt Royal.
378—A Young Clerk's Pluck; or, Fighting Against Long Odds. By John L. Douglas.
379—The Trail Over Seas; or, Gordon Keith's Brilliant Play. By Lawrence White, Jr.
380—The Young Ambassador; or, Washington's First Triumph. By John De Morgan.
381—The Boy Path Finder; or, The Mystery of the Masked Rajah. By William G. Patten.
382—The Young Patriot; or, The Plucky Guardsman at Fort William Henry. By Lieut. Lionel Lounsberry.
383—Witches of the Flame; or, The Mystery of Burning Valley. By John L. Douglas.
384—The Outcast Prince; or, The Power of the Spaniard. By John De Morgan.
385—A Dash Into Mystery; or, Gordon Keith's Amazing Nerve. By John L. Douglas.
386—Winning His Rights; or, The Fortunes of Vernon Craig. By John L. Douglas.
387—The Haunted Cabin; or, A Creature of the Pines. By John L. Douglas.

For sale by all newsdealers, or will be sent to any address on receipt of price, 5 cents per copy, in money or postage stamps, by

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York

IF YOU WANT ANY BACK NUMBERS of our Weeklies and cannot procure them from your newsdealer, they can be obtained from this office direct. Fill out the following Order Blank and send it to us with the price of the Weeklies you want and we will send them to you by return mail. **POSTAGE STAMPS TAKEN THE SAME AS MONEY.**

STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. *190*

Dear Sirs: Enclosed please find.....*cents for which send me:*

TIP TOP WEEKLY, Nos.....
NICK CARTER WEEKLY, " .....
DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY, " .....
BUFFALO BILL STORIES, Nos.....
BRAVE AND BOLD WEEKLY, " .....

Name.....*Street*.....*City*.....*State*.....

The Nick Carter Weekly

ISSUED EVERY SATURDAY **BEAUTIFUL COLORED COVERS**

When it comes to detective stories worth while, the NICK CARTER WEEKLY contains the only ones that should be considered. They are not overdrawn tales of bloodshed. They rather show the workings of one of the finest minds ever conceived by a writer.

The name of Nick Carter is familiar all over the world and the stories of his adventures are read eagerly by millions, in twenty different languages. No other stories have withstood the severe test of time so well as those contained in the NICK CARTER WEEKLY. It proves conclusively that they are best.

We give herewith a list of all the back numbers in print. You can have your news-dealer order them or they will be sent direct by the publishers to any address upon receipt of the price in money or postage-stamps.

385—The Secret Order of Associated Crooks.
386—When Aces Were Trumps.
387—The Gambler's Last Hand.
388—The Murder at Linden Fells.
389—Mercedes Danton's Double.
390—The Millionaire's Nemesis.
391—A Princess of the Underworld.
392—A Queen of Her Kind.
393—Isabel Benton's Trump Card.
433—The Pirate of the Sound.
434—The Cruise of the Shadow.
435—A Prince of Impostors.
437—Following a Blind Trail.
438—The Crime of the Potomac.
439—In the Shadow of Death.
442—A Clever Grab.
443—The Mystery of the Front Room.
444—The Crime of Union Square.
445—A Millionaire Criminal.
446—The Broadway Cross.
447—The Princess Possess.
448—The Quexel Tragedy.
450—Missing; a Sack of Gold.
451—The Great Cathedral Mystery.
452—A Play for a Million.
453—The Pear-Shaped Diamonds.
455—Nick Carter's Human Weapon.
456—The Compact of Death.
457—The Rajah's Revenge.
458—A Tragedy of the Sea.
461—Nick Carter's Strange Power.
462—Nick Carter and the Marixburg Affair.
463—The Millionaire Cracksman.
464—The Mystery Man.
465—Scylla the Sea Robber.
466—The Beautiful Pirate of Oyster Bay.
467—The Man from Nevada.
468—Maguey, the Mexican.
469—Pedro, the Dog Detective.
470—The Automobile Fiend.
471—Bellini, the Black Hand.
472—The Black Hand's Nemesis.
473—An Expert in Craft.
474—Nick Carter's Terrible Experience.
475—The Mystery of an Untold Crime.
476—Diana, the Arch-demon.
478—A Wizard of the Highway.
479—Abducted in Broad Day.
480—The Tong of the Tailless Dragon.
481—The Padlocked Mystery.
482—Dema, the Dangerous.
483—Nick Carter's Murder Problem.
484—A Battle Among the Clouds.
485—The Veiled Princess.
486—The Conquest of a Kingdom.
487—The House of Skeletons.
488—A Queen of Inferno.
489—Nick Carter's Foxy Adversary.
490—Three Times in Peril.
491—The Gold Lettered Dagger.
492—That Mysterious Affair.
493—A Dead Guardian of Millions.
494—The Mysterious Treasure Hunters.
495—The Klondike Bank Puzzle.
496—The "Bad Man" of Nome.
498—Following an Ocean Trail.
499—A Clue from the Clouds.
500—Praxatel, of the Ironarm.
502—Ismalla, the Chieftain.
503—Nick Carter's Earthquake Clue.
504—Nick Carter Among the Bad Men.
505—The Man of Many Faces.
506—A Letter from the Dead.
507—Bare-faced Jimmy, the Gentleman Crook.
509—The "Skiddoo" of the K. U. & T.
510—The Last of the Outlaws.
511—Nick Carter's Twin Mystery.
512—A Battle of Wits.
513—A Game of Five Millions.
514—Codman the Poisoner.
515—The Plot of the Poisoner.
516—The Mechanical Giant.
517—Doris, the Unknown.
518—A Dangerous Woman.
519—Madge Morley's Ghost.
520—An Automobile Mystery.
521—The Mysterious Stranger.
522—The White Arm of a Woman.
523—The Man in the Doorway.
524—The Plot of the Baron.
525—The Passenger on the Night Local.
526—A Double Mystery.
527—Clarice, the Countess.
530—An Amazonian Queen.
531—A Blackmailer's Paradise.
532—Gipsy Madge, the Blackmailer.
533—Facing an Unseen Terror.
534—Idayah, the Woman of Mystery.
535—The Making of a King.
536—The Empire of a Goddess.
537—Zanabayah, the Terrible.
538—The Seven-headed Monster.
539—The Woman of the Mask.
540—The Masked Woman's Daring Plot.
541—Hobo Harry, the Beggar King.
542—Black Madge's Hobo Gang.
543—Black Madge's Vengeance.
544—A Tragedy of the Footlights.
545—The Maynard Woman's Double.
546—Three Against Fifteen.
547—A Mystery of Two Passengers.
548—A Dead Man at the Feast.
549—The House of Secrets.
550—The Lost Bank President.
551—Ralph Bolton's Double Plot.
552—The Dare-devil Crook.
553—A Mystery from the Klondyke
554—Returned from the Grave.
555—The Mystery Man of 7-Up Ranch.
556—A Bad Man of Montana.
557—The Man from Arizona.
558—Kid Curry's Last Stand.
559—A Beautiful Anarchist.
560—The Nihilist's Second Move.
561—The Brotherhood of Free Russia.
562—A White House Mystery.
563—The Great Spy System.
564—The Last of Mustushimi.
565—Secrets of a Haunted House.
566—A Mystery in India Ink.
567—The Plot of the Stantons.
568—The Criminal Trust.
569—The Syndicate of Crooks.
570—The Order of the Python.
571—Tried for His Life.
572—A Bargain With a Thief.
573—Peters, the Shrewd Crook.
574—The Mystery of the Empty Grave.
575—The Yellow Beryl.
576—The Dead Man on the Roof.
577—A Double-barreled Puzzle.
578—An Automobile Duel.
579—Jasper Ryan's Counter Move.
580—An International Conspiracy.
581—Plotters Against a Nation.
582—Mignon Duprez, the Female Spy
583—A Mystery of High Society.
584—A Million Dollars Reward.
585—The Signal of Seven Shots.
586—The "Shadow."
587—A Dead Man's Secret.
588—A Victim of Magic.
589—A Plot Within a Palace.
590—The Countess Zeta's Defense.
591—The Princess' Last Effort.
592—The Two Lost Chittendens.
593—Miguel, the Avenger.
594—Eulalia, the Bandit Queen.
595—The Crystal Mystery.
596—A Battle of Wit and Skill.
597—Vanderdyken, the Millionaire.
598—Patsy's Vacation Problem.
599—The King's Prisoner.
600—A Woman to the Rescue.
601—Nick Carter in Japan.
602—Talika, the Geisha Girl.
603—By Order of the Emperor.
604—The Convict's Secret.
605—The Man in the Dark.
606—An Anarchist Plot.
607—The Mysterious Mr. Peters.
608—A Woman at Bay.
609—The Balloon Tragedy.
610—Nick Carter's Strangest Case.
611—The Stolen Treasure.
612—The Island of Fire.
613—The Senator's Plot.
614—The Madness of Morgan.
615—A Million-dollar Hold-up.
616—Nick Carter's Submarine Clue.
617—Under the Flag of Chance.
618—The Case Against Judge Bernard.
619—Down to the Grave.
620—The Fatal Javelin.
621—The Ghost of Nick Carter.
622—A Strange Coincidence.
623—Pauline—A Mystery.
624—A Woman of Plots.
625—A Millionaire Swindler.
626—The Money Schemers.
627—On the Trail of the Moon.
628—The House of Mystery.
629—The Disappearance of Monsieur Gereaux.
630—An Heiress to Millions.
631—The Man in the Biograph.
632—The Time-lock Puzzle.
633—The Moving Picture Mystery.
634—The Tiger-tamer.
635—A Strange Bargain.
636—The Haunted Circus.
637—The Secret of a Private Room.
638—A Mental Mystery.
639—The Sealed Envelope.
640—The Message in Blue.
641—A Dream of Empire.
642—The Detective's Disappearance.
643—The Midnight Marauders.
644—The Child of the Jungle.
645—Nick Carter's Satanic Enemy.
646—Three Times Stolen.
647—The Great Diamond Syndicate.
648—The House of the Yellow Door.
649—The Triangle Clue.
650—The Hollingsworth Puzzle.
651—The Affair of the Missing Bonds
652—The Green Box Clue.
653—The Taxi-cab Mystery.
654—The Mystery of a Hotel Room.
655—The Tragedy of the Well.
656—The Black Hand.
657—The Black Hand Nemesis.
658—A Masterly Trick.
659—A Dangerous Man.
660—Castor, the Poisoner.
661—The Castor Riddle.
662—A Tragedy of the Bowery.
663—Four Scraps of Paper.
664—The Secret of the Mine.
665—The Dead Man in the Car.
666—Nick Carter's Master Struggle.
667—The Air-shaft Spectre.
668—The Broken Latch.
669—Nick Carter's Sudden Peril.
670—The Man with the Missing Thumb.
671—Feltman, the "Fence."
672—A Night with Nick Carter.
673—In the Nick of Time.
674—The Dictator's Treasure.
675—Pieces of Eight.
676—Behind the Mask.
677—The Green Patch.
678—The Drab Thread.
679—The Live-wire Clue.
680—The Vampires of the Tenements.
681—The Policy King Baffled.
682—The Madman's Gig.
683—A Life at Stake.
684—Trailing a Secret Thread.
685—The Crimson Flash.
686—A Puzzle of Identities.
687—The Westervelt Option.
688—The Vanishing Heiress.
689—The Birth of a Mystery.
690—A Clue from the Past.
691—The Red Triangle.
692—Doctor Quartz Again.
693—The Famous Case of Doctor Quartz.
694—The Chemical Clue.
695—The Prison Cipher.
696—A Pupil of Doctor Quartz.
697—The Midnight Visitor.
698—The Master Crook's Match.
699—The Man Who Vanished.
700—The Garnet Gauntlet.

PRICE, FIVE CENTS PER COPY

If you want any back numbers of our weeklies and cannot procure them from your news-dealer, they can be obtained direct from this office. Postage-stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS, 79-89 SEVENTH AVE., NEW YORK